

Monastic Scribe 107 – August 7, 2026

I CONFESS...

For over three years now people have written to me and often shared their struggles and attempts to live their way to God. Perhaps, I thought, I should share some of my own journey. I am attempting to choose some memories of my long life that, hopefully, show that I am not better or worse than any of my readers. I was a child of the depression and my childhood was lived through the second world war. This was a world of much simpler patterns of life. I had a happy childhood despite my father losing his job and our family's financial struggles. I was an altar boy, went first to a public school and then a Catholic School and was a good student. Life was simple. We respected authority - parents, teachers, priests and nuns, our government officials. They all knew better than us kids and we had to learn from them. Without a car, my bicycle was a main means of getting anywhere. I got into trouble sometimes but my parents and big brother looked after me.

Life changed when I entered the seminary. In Grade School and at home there were many women. Now I faced a world of men. Adolescence was a tough time to find myself. We had a former marine as prefect and seminary life was like basic training. Having other guys my age buffered life for me. Learning to deal with my sexuality and develop good relationships was challenging. I conformed and repressed to a good degree. The age of doubts was ahead of me.

I entered the monastery at age nineteen, went through novitiate and years of study. Life did not really change until I was ordained and then sent to the University of Ottawa in Canada for three years. Here I met monks from other abbeys and, more importantly, met many lay people who challenged my clerical upbringing. Becoming friendly with some women made me grow up as a man. Returning to the monastery I was chosen for various responsibilities. I taught in the seminary, led liturgies, and became Dean of a household of about twenty-five seminarians and also Director of our summer Boys' Camp. I was one of the "young Turks" in the abbey who, in the time of the Second Vatican Council, questioned a lot of the old ways. The sixties brought division in the community. In 1969 seven of us monks were given permission to begin an inner-city community and the Archbishop of New Orleans welcomed us into social apostolate ministries. We eventually moved to Baltimore to take over a settlement house. When that broke up, I stayed in Baltimore and became the principal of a coed Catholic High School.

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My monastic heart soon pushed me to look for a small Benedictine monastery and I chose one in New England which appealed to my Irish roots. I have spent fifty years here at Glastonbury and served as Prior, Formation Director, Retreat Director, founder of the Bookstore. These years were often tough and I have lived through times of depression. Three years living and studying in Rome widened my vision. During this time, the community grew to almost 20 monks and then, in the nineties, began to shrink.

I test out as an introvert and I am a perpetual student, always wanting to know more. Four major degrees, two Masters and two Licenses, have been in my life story. But a real pursuit of history and culture came upon me in the eighties when I delved into Celtic Spirituality. With the help of an Irish born woman Celtic harpist I began to give Celtic retreats which greatly broadened people's view of Christianity. I have published three books on the theme. Then I began to lead pilgrimages to Ireland which then broadened to other countries and went on for twenty years until the pandemic brought them to an end.

I am in my elder years now and facing bodily diminishment. Some three and a half years ago I started writing a blog on spiritual and other matters. I did this to emulate my hero, Thomas Merton, who wrote from his monastic life poetry, history, theology and a depth perception of the times we live in. I do not consider myself the ilk of Merton but he inspires me to be honest, open, non-judgmental and caring about my fellow human beings. I have the confidence now to feel it is okay when I am wrong, but many people write to share their life experiences which are often similar to my own. People are searching, reading, thinking, experiencing God in mystical and profound ways. Other people have not gotten past their childhood sense of God, church and religion and welcome new perspectives.

The biggest challenge of elderly life is "to let go". My own ego is the biggest obstacle to get over. I like being thanked and affirmed but I have to also thank those who find fault with me. I have to let go of my early manhood with its strengths and abilities. I let go of good health, of family and friends. But I do not regret growing older. There is much to be thankful for. I tell God I think I am ready to die (which hasn't been tested yet) but do what I can while I live.

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I have my bad days, my down days, but, generally, I so appreciate all that has been given –family, community, friends, monastic life and prayer and, yes, also trials and mistakes. My faith in God becomes more nebulous but deeper. I am a paradox to myself but have Merton's ideals of wisdom and prophecy to guide me. I know people are basically good and I hope I encourage you readers to be thankful for your life stories too. You can always write me at: joycet@glastonburyabbey.org.

Fr. Timothy Joyce, OSB, STL

Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.