

6420 Reisterstown Road  
Baltimore, Maryland  
9 June 1966

Dear Father Abbot,

Obviously, letter-writing isn't one of my fondest occupations, but I've gotten so far behind in answering letters that I've resolved to write one letter a day until I've caught up. I feel somewhat less guilty as far as you are concerned since Sister Vincent told me that she sends you periodic reports on my condition. She can certainly give you a clearer picture of my progress than I could. In fact, I have the dark suspicion that when I leave this place, if anyone ever again asks me, "How do you feel?" I shall happily strangle him! After nine months it's still difficult for me to answer that question. Some days I think I've progressed; other days I feel sure I've gotten worse. And so it goes. I thought when I was transferred to an open hall, things would get better. But I'm not too sure now. Being on an open hall imposes more responsibility on the patient and also more opportunities for regressing and withdrawing. For the past few weeks I've had the feeling that I was withdrawing more than I should, but at least I'm aware of the fact and also I know why I was withdrawing and some of the defenses I was using; so maybe all isn't lost. Although the point hasn't come under careful scrutiny as yet in the process of therapy, I feel strongly that successful treatment must involve my attitude toward the priesthood and religious life. Perhaps psychotherapy will indicate that I should seek a dispensation. At this point I don't think I know myself well enough to make such a decision. In passing, I might remark that the last time I saw Dr. McNamara at Sartell he suggested that I should think seriously of laicizing. I remember the suggestion infuriated and frightened me. Now, however, when I think of the possibility of leaving the priesthood, it doesn't frighten me; in fact, it usually causes a sense of relief. But the nature of this "sense of relief" is what causes me some concern. Is leaving the priesthood another way of escaping responsibility and commitment or ~~is~~ am I really psychologically unsuited for the religious life? As yet I cannot honestly solve this problem; some more basic questions about myself must first be answered. It might be encouraging to know that Sister Vincent feels we are beginning to get into the heart of the dilemma. The big danger, however, seems to be that the deeper into the problem the patient goes, the more painful the process becomes; result: the patient begins to fight the psychiatrist, albeit, frequently unconsciously. So much for my present condition.

Aquinas keeps me up to date on life at the Abbey, as does my copy of The Record. I would be grateful if you could send me a copy of The Sag. The dedication of the new library must have been a memorable occasion. I was delightfully surprised by the editorial of Larry Haeg in the issue of the Record immediately prior to the dedication. It was certainly candid. Fr. Sylvan wrote me about the intended dedication ceremonies at St. Augustine's. I wish I could have been there; I miss the Bahamas quite a bit. Fr. Meinrad paid me a surprise visit some weeks ago, spending several hours. Brice also stopped off on his way to a meeting at CU.

Today, the feast of Corpus Christi, is being celebrated with liturgical pomp and splendor at Seton. This morning there was a High Mass and this evening there will be an outdoor procession in what is called the "Rose Circle." The procession will include the Knights of Columbus in full dress, the nurses, the student nurses, the doctors, the patients, the janitors, the maintenance men, the waitresses, the maids, and all the relatives of the aforementioned. From remarks that have been dropped about Corpus Christi processions in past years, I've concluded that anything less than the presence of Pope Paul will certainly be anti-climatic. The assistant supervisor of the place is a nun who has a mania for artificial flowers. Today

she's gone completely berserk with flowers, and the place has all the warmth of a well-kept mortuary chapel.

Holy Week was interesting here. On Holy Thursday thirteen of the priest-patients concelebrated, the first time Seton had witnessed a concelebration. I volunteered to help with the music for Holy Week (another indication of how seriously sick I am). The "choir" was composed of about eight nuns and four or five patients. We practiced nightly for about a week. The results more closely resembled a Watusi tribal celebration than the chants of the Roman Church. When Sister Ambrose, the administrator, remarked on Easter Sunday evening that the music during Holy Week was the best she had ever heard at Seton, I had some black thoughts as to her competency in running a psychiatric institution! I think, though, the highpoint of the services was the singing of the Exultet in English by a priest from New Jersey, who did a tremendous job.

You undoubtedly heard of the death of Fr. Kieran Connolly, a priest-patient from St. Meinrad's. I had gotten to know him fairly well; in fact, we had been bowling together the day of his death. He had made a great impression on the patients who got to know him. About two weeks ago a patient I had been on closed hall with for some time hanged himself. It's difficult to describe the effect such a thing has on the patients. Such an incident perhaps symbolizes the mysterious quality of emotional disorders. A patient with whom you live closely and whom you think you know suddenly says or does the unexpected or bizarre. Although I should be accustomed to such behavior after nine months here, I find it still disturbs me and ~~usually~~ even causes me to question my own sanity on occasion. In spite of the fact that I know being here is for my own good, the place still depresses the hell out of me and the frequent urge to leave is very strong. But I suppose this is all part of what is known as psychotherapy.

I was genuinely shocked to hear of the death of Fr. Clarus. He had been very kind to me, and I know I caused him quite a bit of pain.

Please give my regards to Fr. Prior and Fr. John, and to the Community. If any of the monks are out this way during the summer, I'd like very much to see them. God bless you and the Community, Father Abbot. Say a prayer that I'll have the guts to see this through.

Filially yours in Christ,

*Robert*, 6/23