

September 15, 2023

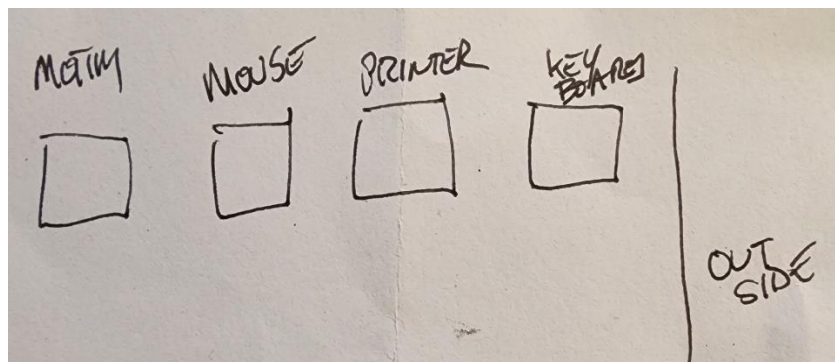
## *Moving & the Lesson of Impermanence*

I don't read the great German poet Rainer Maria Rilke too often because whenever I do, I always come across a line or two in his poetry and prose that stops me in my tracks. Over the last nearly eight years in Haiti, I didn't really want to be stopped in my tracks, as I had to keep moving because there was so much stuff to do and so many interruptions (by the kids) and obstacles (from the lack of a functioning government) to overcome.

These last two weeks in Florida have been nonstop movement, shuttling things from my little apartment in Fort Pierce to my new, larger apartment in Vero Beach. I call the move *Making Space for Dr. Stéphanie*. After my new landlord and his visiting daughter helped me move my computer and two chairs on Wednesday, the move was 90% completed.



I overcame my fear of computers and, to my amazement I was able to hook everything back up...and it all worked. Of course, before unplugging all the cables going into the computer, I took photos of the way it was in hope it would resemble the way it would be in Vero. I even made a sketch of the portals in the back of the computer to identify which cables went where. When it was all hooked up, I felt like I needed to do a nine-day novena to muster the courage to turn on the computer. I assumed it would not work. But it did work!!!



With the computer working, I can get back to Rilke in a moment. My plan on Wednesday was to return to my old place and spend the next few nights there, gathering up the remaining items to

be moved and to clean the place. But then I had this thought: *Why am I spending a night in a nearly empty apartment when I can stay in Vero where all my stuff is?* There was no reason not to stay. So, I zipped back to Ft. Pierce, packed up my coffee maker and Rebo coffee (Haitian coffee), my toaster, all my toiletries, and a few items of clothing. When I got back to Vero Beach, I spent the evening slowly organizing my books and my office. It was so wonderful to have my office in one room, separated from the “home” space. In my old place there was no separation from the work and home spaces. Moreover, things work related were scattered about the apartment, in the bedroom and closets.

Yesterday morning, as I continued to unpack my books, I came across a book containing a selection of short passages of Rilke’s writing.

Whoever you may be: step into the evening.  
Step out of the room where everything is known.  
Whoever you are,  
your house is the last before the far-off.  
With tired eyes, which are almost too tired,  
you slowly take on black tree  
and set it against the sky: slender, alone.  
And you have made a world.  
It is big  
and like a word, still ripening in silence.  
And though your mind would fabricate its meaning,  
Your eyes tenderly let go of what they see.

I just stepped out of an apartment where everything was known and into the evening of mystery. In May of 2015 I stepped out of a country I knew well and stepped into an unknown country where most of the people only knew poverty and violence. It made a huge difference in my life, bringing my much hardships, much sadness, and even more happiness and fulfillment. Entering deeply into physical poverty immeasurably enriched my spiritual life.

And then there was this Rilke:

Impermanence plunges us into the depth of all Being. And so all forms of the present are not to be taken and bound in time, but held in a larger context of meaning in which we participate. I don’t mean this in a Christian sense...but in a sheer earthly, deep earthly, sacred earthly consciousness: that what we see here and now is to bring us into a wider—indeed, the very widest—dimension. Not in an afterlife whose shadow darkens the earth, but in a whole that is the whole.

You may ponder that on your own. In truth, we are all migrants, migrating from earth to heaven.

Here comes another photo of the 2<sup>nd</sup> school from Steph...



The second schoolhouse looks to me like an ark. Hopefully the kids will sail into a better future because of the education they will receive.

On Wednesday, a generous Journal reader sent me a note saying she will send \$10,000 to help with the completion of the construction of the school. In flash, my construction deficit was cut in half, going from 20k down to 10k. It is all grace. Grace is everywhere. Just look to see it.

### ***A Review of Reading Thomas Merton and Longing for God in Haiti***

**By Deacon Dennis Dolan**

A Paulist Deacon Affiliate serving in St. Petersburg, Florida

The writing in Gerry Straub's book, *Reading Thomas Merton and Longing for God in Haiti*, reminds me of Merton's writing in its honesty. I would use this book for adult faith formation. It's an easy book to read. There is so much spiritual wealth scattered throughout, including a wide-range of quotes from great spiritual writers. What you will find in this book is an imperfect but deep lay person trying to put his struggles with life and faith together, which is what Merton did in his writing.

When I look at Merton's writing and I step back from it, it depicts a guy trying to put the pieces together. Merton was wrestling with himself. Of course, now that Merton's diaries have been

released, one can see the raw material. It's not a finished book where we get the idea that this guy's having lunch with God and floating on clouds in Kentucky. It's a guy struggling through all his stuff. We all have stuff we wrestle with. Gerry Straub read Merton when he was an atheist because he was a deep person and game recognizes game.

In *Reading Thomas Merton and Longing for God in Haiti*, Gerry shows us a lot of his struggles and doubts, his stuff, as he wrestles with real life problems. This is how mature adults put together a life of the gospel. The book is a manual in the sense that we see a model of what it's like to do one's homework and to put it into practice the demands of the gospel. Gerry's book is a lesson in how to do it for any adult who's serious about their faith.

Gerry's maturing faith took him to Haiti to care for abandoned kids. But you don't have to go to Haiti. Pick a pile and grab a shovel; there is plenty to do in your neighborhood.

I am going to give *Reading Thomas Merton and Longing for God in Haiti* the Deacon Dolan money back guarantee. If you buy this book and you don't like it, just send it to me and I personally will give you your money back.

**Deacon Dennis Dolan** has been a permanent deacon since August, 1993. He spent many years as a Catholic chaplain with the Connecticut Department of Corrections. Deacon Dennis became a Paulist Deacon Affiliate in 2018. Deacon Dennis currently serves in a parish in the Diocese of St. Petersburg, Florida. He and his wife Deborah have three children and five grandchildren.

*Deacon Dennis was one of the three deacons who interviewed me on Deacons Pod, which is still available on their website at **deaconsPod.com***