

On Thursday at Morning Prayer, we read a reflection from Thomas Merton, as we do each time we gather for this service in 2016. He was reflecting on the importance of Scripture, and how it nourished him in his vocation as a Religious. It also reminded him, he said, of how “...I live again in the lineage of Saint Bernard, and I see that had I been deeper in Scripture, all temptations to run to some other order would have lost their meaning, for contemplation is found in faith, not in geography; you dig for it in Scripture but cannot find it by crossing the sea.”

That wonderful image of digging for the truth of Scripture sustained me greatly, and I thought it so appropriate as we celebrated the Feast of St. Bernard (to whom Merton referred) just two days later, on Saturday 20th August. Bernard of Clairvaux was born in the late 11th century, in France. Following the relatively early death of his mother, when he was 19 years old, he applied for admission to an order of Monks in a nearby Cistercian Monastery. He quickly became noticed by his superiors for his wisdom, and just three years later was sent to begin a new Abbey in Claire Valley – which became later known as Clairvaux.

His life was marked by turmoil within the church. A schism broke out with the death of a pope and the election of a new, and the period of the Second Crusade was significant in his lifetime, and a cause of much sadness for him. He died at the age of 63 years, having led the Cistercian Order at Clairvaux for 40 years. Bernard of Clairvaux was a wise man who left behind many quotes, some of which you may know. For example, did you know that St. Bernard said “The road to hell is paved with good intentions”? Or that Calvin based much of his arguments for the doctrine of salvation “by faith alone” on the theology of Bernard?

Let me share with you, though, my favourite St. Bernard quote – “There are those who seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge; that is Curiosity. There are those who seek knowledge to be known by others; that is Vanity. There are those who seek knowledge in order to serve; that is Love.”

Many people devote their lives to the acquiring of knowledge, but there is an important difference between them, and what is the impetus or the reason for the acquiring of this knowledge – is it so that they can satisfy their own curiosity, or the curiosity of others, or to get ahead, as it were. Or does the use of the knowledge gained through life and experience lead one to love others by serving them?

So, Bernard of Clairvaux, this man who lived almost one millennia ago, teaches us the importance of service, and the importance of love. Let us reflect on those qualities in our own lives, and strive to bring them more to the forefront.

May Bartholomew, Monica, and all the Saints walk with you this week... *Sam*