

# Author Jim Forest Leads Workshop on Pilgrimage, Thomas Merton, and Icons

**AUTHOR JIM FOREST BELIEVES EVERYONE** who seeks to know God is on a pilgrimage, throughout their lives. No one exemplifies the idea of the lifelong pilgrimage better than Thomas Merton, whose search led him to become a Trappist monk.

Mr. Forest, who has written a biography of Merton and was close to him in his final years, will lead a workshop at Bon Secours on October 10 on “Walking the Road to Emmaus: Thomas Merton’s Pilgrimage and Prayer with Icons.”

In a way, he says, the workshop brings together three books he has written: *The Road to Emmaus: Pilgrimage as a Way of Life*, *Living With Wisdom: A Biography of Thomas Merton*, and *Praying With Icons*.

“It’s not so easy for us in the West to understand icons,” he says, “because we’re separated by almost 1,000 years from the traditional role icons played. We see icons as illustrations, but they developed in the Church to help us, through our senses, to enter a deeper level of belief.”

The Church always insisted that we live our faith physically, he explains. Icons are one of the many ways the Church tries to integrate the physical with the spiritual. “Icons can play a significant role in leading you to the deeper spiritual realms of prayer.”

Mr. Forest says that Merton’s discovery of icons on a visit to Rome as a teenager

marked the beginning of his spiritual pilgrimage. “Had he not seen icons,” he says, “I doubt anyone today would have heard of Merton.” He also notes that icons were important to Merton right to the end of his spiritual life. “When he died, one of the very few things he had with him was a small icon,” he says.

Mr. Forest’s own pilgrimage has been full of surprising turns. The son of parents who abandoned organized religion for the Communist Party, he began his religious journey as a teenager in the Episcopal Church, but later became a Catholic. Shortly after, he joined the Catholic Worker movement, becoming managing editor of its publication, *The Catholic Worker*, and working closely with its founder, Dorothy Day. She in turn introduced him to Merton, with whom he developed a long correspondence. Merton also introduced him to practices and traditions of the Eastern Church. In 1988, Mr. Forest and his wife, Nancy, were received into the Orthodox Church.

Mr. Forest, who lives in Holland, is secretary of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship and edits its quarterly publication, *In Communion*.

Please join Jim Forest October 10 at Bon Secours for an exciting workshop on pilgrimage, Thomas Merton, and using icons as tools for prayer. ♡

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