

2015, May.

A few weeks ago I became aware of the accusations made concerning Pere Thomas. I was overwhelmed and shocked, absolutely unable to understand how this could have happened.

I was even more shocked that such revelations have come now, so many years after his death, with some acts going back to the 1970's. A few years ago I was told of certain acts, but until now I remained totally in the dark as to the depth of their gravity. Therefore, the news of these revelations hit me like a terrible storm.

Today, after my time in the hospital and a time of rest near the sea, I feel freer, and more at peace. I have taken time to integrate all of this in silence and prayer. In this spirit of inner freedom, I now would like to write what comes up from my heart.

On one hand, I heard the accusations and denunciations made concerning Pere Thomas. He hurt mature and intelligent people who appear to have placed all of their trust in him. These people have been hurt, and have been real victims. I can only weep with them. I do not doubt in any way what they say. I wish to tell them that they have all my compassion for what they have lived.

On the other hand, I need to affirm my own experience and gratitude toward Pere Thomas. In regards to my life journey, he was an instrument of God. I met him in 1950 when I left the navy. I sensed in him a man of God. He led me to Jesus. Through his word and accompaniment I was transformed as a disciple and friend of Jesus. Through many long years, between 1956 and 1964, I lived by myself, in a hermitage in Fatima and elsewhere, and I waited for signs to see what Jesus was wanting from me. In 1964, I left my life as a professor at the University of Toronto to rejoin Pere Thomas at Trosly, where he had become the chaplain of Val Fleuri. At that time he received much help and support from Dr. Préaut, an eminent psychiatrist in the department of Oise. Thanks to both Pere Thomas and Dr. Préaut, I discovered the terrible situation of people with developmental disabilities. A dream that I had when I left the navy – to live with the poor, through love for Jesus, and to

consecrate my life to them – became possible with the support of Dr. Préaut and the priestly presence of Pere Thomas. This is how I founded L'Arche and then accompanied L'Arche throughout the different turning points of its growth. Other people came to help, who were deeply touched and transformed by people with disabilities. Pere Thomas played an important role of support and prayer in L'Arche for many long years. This was despite the fact that there were sometimes some very great differences between the two of us, notably on the meaning and vocation of this community that was growing throughout the world and in ecumenical and inter-religious ways.

There is a tremendous gap between, on the one hand, the serious nature of these acts that generated such suffering in the victims and, on the other hand, the action of God in me and in L'Arche through Pere Thomas. I am unable to peacefully reconcile these two realities. All I can say is, "I do not understand."

I cannot judge Pere Thomas; God alone can judge. Jesus is merciful and he forgives in his love. When I am in the place of "I do not understand" and "non-judgment", I am at peace – without searching to know more - dwelling in Jesus who is at the heart of L'Arche and at the heart of my life.

This said, in thinking of the victims and of their suffering, I want to ask for forgiveness for all that I did not do or should have done. Only forgiveness will mend the breaches in the hearts and the communities.

*Jean Vanier*