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Blessed Nell,

What a good talk we had last night, and how sick I am that you, of all people, should have been subjected to that brand of hatred : it is even painful for me to write that word "hatred". We live at the edge of insanity, cultural insanity - we have voted against truth, sanity, humanity. We know that, and yet the manifestation of it, as you experienced it, is deeply wounding, and I have always hoped that special people like yourself could be spared too close a look. Understanding why it happened and how it could have happened does not lessen the shock of it.

Strange, yesterday an idiot was here, not hesitating to ask the most personal questions about "why" a man would do the kind of work I have done. Before I could speak, he told me that most people thought I had taken some kind of private vow that if God would let me live....

I blasted him, told him that was utterly wrong and that I did not make bargains ever with God and that I could not correct every damned fool speculation people voiced about me. He never understood. He never understood that I have lived with an intuitive (and experienced) vision of the hell to which you were subjected and that is reason enough to throw my puny strength into minimizing it.

I think of Merton's words: "Does there always have to be a reason?" Most people are gluttonous for "reasons" why a man is led to act in such and such a way. Another unwelcome visitor comes and tries yesterday to get to the "reasons" why monasticism makes any sense, and "what good does it do?" I told him that since he asked that kind of question I despaired of giving him any answers that would satisfy his needs, the needs of this lust to find "reasons" that conform to one's little prejudices. (His being the prejudice that every man's life must do some tangible good for another, for society, for "humanity.") I told him that for one thing, they believed in the efficacy of prayer.

"I do too," he said, "but not all the time."

I will not sully your eyes, dear Nell, by writing the word I tossed at him.

All for the moment. Take care of yourself for our sake. I enclose some photos, one showing the estate of the beard taken yesterday, and anything else I can find. Great love to you from all of us here,

John