

**Here is follow-up on the Thea Forum in Brooklyn from May 8, 2010 The Tablet.**

A Tablet Forum To Remember

By Ed Wilkinson, Editor

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Last week's Tablet Forum at Immaculate Conception Center in Douglaston certainly was popular. It also was extremely timely, interesting and insightful.

Previous Forums have dealt with Dorothy Day, Father Thomas Merton and Father Henri Nouwen. This one delved into the story of Sister Thea Bowman, a member of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration of La Crosse, Wisc., who made an imprint on religious life in the African-American community.

We thought this Forum would have limited appeal since we weren't sure how well known Sister Thea was outside the black Catholic community. But we soon discovered from the demand for tickets that she was extremely popular across the board. We had more than 500 requests for seats, but we had to stop issuing tickets because the auditorium in Douglaston can only seat a little more than 400. As it turned out, about 350 people showed up; we could have sent out a few more.

This Forum followed the same format as previous ones. Father Frank Mann, who organizes these evenings on behalf of The Tablet, introduced a 45-minute film about the life and legacy of Sister Thea. We had a short intermission with coffee and cake. The audience was then treated to personal testimony about the effect of Sister Thea's teaching from Brother Michael O'Neill McGrath, an Oblate of St. Francis de Sales, who lives in the Diocese of Camden.

A noted artist, Brother Mickey, as he is known to his friends, spoke about how Thea's writings helped him deal with the death of his father. He never knew Thea personally, only through her written words. Yet the effect she left was unmistakable. Brother Mickey showed pieces of art he had created that were inspired by Sister Thea's life, which was tragically short due to cancer. She was only 52 when she died.

Brother Mickey feels such an attachment to this contemporary holy woman that he has traveled to her hometown in Canton, Mississippi, and visited the house where she was born and raised. It is now owned by a family friend who has turned the residence into a memorial for Sister Thea out of personal devotion to her.

On the left-hand side of the small home is a sign which reads, "Sainthood for Sister Thea." It's a theme that clearly was popular at this evening's program.

Following the talk by Brother Mickey, he was swamped by his new fans as he signed his books and posters about Sister Thea.

As the final forum-goers drove off the Douglaston campus, Brother Mickey, and his "business" partner, Brother Bob, broke down their display and packed it into their SUV for the ride home to Camden as the memory of Sister Thea was being carried back into the neighborhoods in the hearts and minds of those who had come to be refreshed with words and images of faith and hope.

Comments:

Father Frank Mann said 05/07/2010 @ 4:07 PM.

I am very grateful for the comment by Mr. Waldman re: The recent Tablet Forum on Sister Thea Bowman. Has anyone else attended these forums (both past and present?) What have your impressions been? Do you have any ideas for future forums? Just for the record: The next Tablet Forum will be on November 4th on the life and vision of Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. Now that WILL be exciting!

Robert Waldman said 05/07/2010 @ 3:04 PM.

I have attended every Tablet forum since its inception. They are just FABULOUS....The forum on Thea Bowman was just exceptional. I am very grateful for what Father Frank Mann had done to bring these exciting presentations to the Diocese. I cannot wait for the next one!