

**606. JERÓNIMOS MONASTERY, BÉLEM,
LISBON, PORTUGAL (1955)**

(French, 1908-2004)

Gelatin silver print.

14 x 9 2/5" (35.5 x 24 cm).

Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson, Paris

Audio courtesy of Acoustiguide



PETER GALASSI:

Cartier-Bresson's favorite kind of assignment, from the '50s, all the way into the '70s was a magazine would say to him, "Go to Portugal for a month, and show us what life in Portugal is like." And that would be the total assignment.

He would do his homework. He would read a lot about the country, and he would make sure to go to all the important places and cover the territory. But he was really looking for the ordinary and the typical, rather than the exceptional.

Here we are in a very beautiful monastery in Lisbon, Portugal. Here you have one dimension of European Catholic religion, all summed up in one picture. You have the very beautiful decorated, encrusted double columns, descending and anchoring the two people right in the center of the picture. That's why it's important that it's a vertical. Two beautiful columns, either coming down from heaven, or going up to heaven, and there in the center of the lower half of the picture you have the priest and the penitent, who are barely separated at all.

They're both entirely clad in black. And the intimacy of the act of confession makes out of the two of them, one complete shape. It's a very good example of how something that is really artistically brilliant doesn't need to be complicated. It can be very simple.