

VINTAGE

Saints & Sinners

Thomas Merton (1915-1968)

1 | Every moment and every event of every person's life on earth plants something in her or his soul. For just as the wind carries thousands of winged seeds, so each moment brings with it germs of spiritual vitality that come to rest imperceptibly in the minds and wills of men and women. Most of these unnumbered seeds perish and are lost, for such seeds as these cannot spring up anywhere except in the good soil of freedom, spontaneity and love. (New Seeds of Contemplation)

Conversion

2 | God---that center Who is everywhere, and whose circumference is nowhere, finding me, through incorporation with Christ, incorporated into the immense and gravitational movement which is love, which is the Holy Spirit---loved me. And he called out to me from His own immense depths. (*Seven Story Mountain*)

3 | at age 23: All of a sudden something began to stir within me, something began to push me, to prompt me. It was a movement that spoke like a voice. 'What are you waiting for?' it said. 'Why are you sitting here? Why do you still hesitate? You know what you ought to do? Why don't you do it?' I stirred in my chair. I lit a cigarette, looked out the window at the rain, tried to shut the voice up. 'Don't act on your impulses,' I thought. 'This is crazy. This is not rational. Read your book.' [the inner voice only renewed its appeal:] 'It's useless to hesitate any longer. Why don't you get up and go?' ...I could bear it no longer. I put down the book, and got into my raincoat, and started down the stairs. I went out into the street. I crossed over, and walked along by the grey wooden fence, towards Broadway, in the light rain. And then everything inside me began to sing. (*Seven Story Mountain, 215-16*)

Contemplation

4 | "Our real journey in life is interior: it is a matter of growth, deepening, and of an ever greater surrender to the creative action of love and grace in our hearts." AJ 296

Gethsemani Monastery, Kentucky | Winter AM: 2:00 Rise, recite Matins & Lauds | 2:30 Meditation | 3:00 Night Office | 4:00 Mass, Communion, Reading | 5:30 Prime, breakfast | 6:30 Reading, Study, Prayer | 7:45 Tierce, Mass, Sext | 9:00 Work | 10:45 Reading, Prayer | 11:07 None | 11:30 Dinner **Winter PM:** 12:15 Reading, Prayer | 1:30 Work | 3:30 Reading, Prayer | 4:30 Vespers | 5:15 Meditation | 5:30 Collation | 5:40 Reading, Prayer | 6:10 Compline, Examination of Conscience | 7:00 All Retire

5 | The new bells sound wonderful from the woods. St. John's day—Frater Tarcisius and I walked all the way to Hanekamp's in the afternoon. Wonderful, quiet little valley! The silent house, the goats in the red sage grass, the dry creek, and Hanekamp's vineyard. The beautiful silence of the woods on every side! Frater Tarcisius looked about with such reverence that you would have thought he was seeing angels. Later we separated to pray apart in the thinned pine grove on the southeastern hillside. And I could see how simple it is to find God in solitude. There is no one else, nothing else. He is all there is to find there. Everything is in Him. And what could be more pleasing to Him than that we should leave all things and all company to be with Him and think only of Him and know Him alone, in order to give Him our love?... My silence is part of the whole world's silence and builds the temple of God without the noise of hammers. *Journals. III.27, 29*

6 | The message of hope the contemplative offers you...is...that whether you understand or not, God loves you, is present in you, lives in you, dwells in you, calls you, saves you, and offers you an understanding and light which are like nothing you ever found in books or heard in sermons.

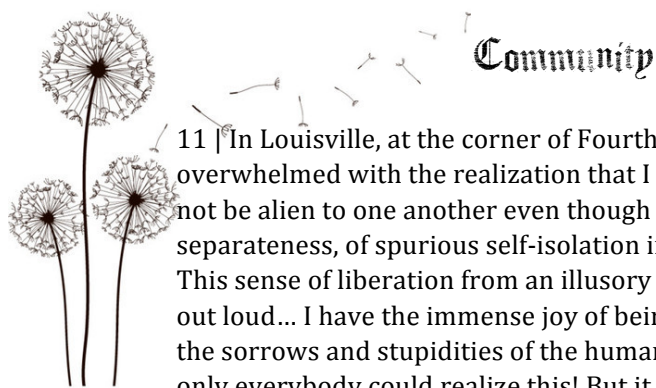
7 | The contemplative life should not be regarded as the exclusive prerogative of those who dwell in monastic walls. All men can seek and find this intimate awareness and awakening which is a gift of love and vivifying touch of creative and redemptive power that power which raised Christ from the dead and cleanses us from dead works to serve the living God...It should certainly be emphasized today that prayer is a real source of personal freedom in the midst of a world in which men are dominated by massive organizations and rigid institutions which seek only to exploit them for money and power. Far from being the cause of alienation, true religion in spirit is a liberating force that helps man to find himself in God." *HGL 159*

8 | There are so many Christians who do not appreciate the magnificent dignity of their vocation to sanctity, to the knowledge, love and service to God. There are so many Christians who do not realize what possibilities God has placed in the life of Christian perfection—what possibilities for joy in the knowledge and love of Him. There are so many Christians who have practically no idea of the immense love of God for them, and of the power of that Love to do them good, to bring them happiness....

But there is only one condition. If you desire intimate union with God you must be willing to pay the price for it. The price is small enough. In fact, it is not even a price at all: it only seems to be so with us. We find it difficult to give up our desire for things that can never satisfy us in order to purchase the One Good in Whom is all our joy—and in Wisdom, moreover, we get back everything else that we have renounced besides!

9 | The fact remains that contemplation will not be given to those who willfully remain at a distance from God, who confine their interior life to a few routine exercises of piety and a few external acts of worship and service performed as a matter of duty. Such people are careful to avoid sin. They respect God as a Master. But their hearts do not belong to Him. They are not really interested in Him, except in order to insure themselves against losing heaven and going to hell. In actual practice, their minds and hearts are taken up with their own ambitions and troubles and comforts and pleasures and all their worldly interests and anxieties and fears. God is only invited to enter this charmed circle to smooth difficulties and to dispense rewards. (*Devotional Classics, 18*)

10 | It seems to me that I have greater peace and am close to God when I am not 'trying to be a contemplative,' or trying to be anything special, but simply orienting my life fully and completely towards what seems to be required of a man like me at a time like this. I am obscurely convinced that there is a need in the world for something I can provide and that there is a need for me to provide it. True, someone else can do it, God does not need me. But I feel He is asking me to provide it. The wonder of being brought, by God, around a corner and to realize a new road is opening up, perhaps—which He alone knows. And that there is no way of traveling it but in Christ and with Him. This is joy and peace—whatever happens. The result does not matter. I have something to do for Him and, if I do that, everything else will follow. *Journals III.159-60*



11 | In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness... This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud... I have the immense joy of being man, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.,,

Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts, where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God's eyes. If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time."

(*Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*)