

truly capable of seeing and appreciating created things and it was because they loved Him alone that they alone loved everybody. (*New Seeds of Contemplation*)

The Divine Spark in Our Own Lives

There are many Christians who serve God with great purity of soul and perfect self-sacrifice in the active life. . . . They know how to find God by devoting themselves to Him in self-sacrificing labors in which they are able to remain in His presence all day long. . . . They lead lives of great simplicity in which they do not need to rise above the ordinary levels of vocal and affective prayer. Without realizing it, their extremely simple prayer is, for them, so deep and interior that it brings them to the threshold of contemplation. (*The Inner Experience*)

Prayer and Conversion

In meditative prayer, one thinks and speaks not only with his mind and lips, but in a certain sense with his *whole being*. Prayer is then not just a formula of words, or a series of desires springing up in the heart---it is the orientation of our whole body, mind and spirit to God in silence, attention, and adoration. All good meditative prayer is a *conversion of our entire self to God*. (*Thoughts in Solitude*)

If we try to contemplate God without having turned the face of our inner self entirely in His direction, we will end up inevitably by contemplating ourselves, and we will perhaps plunge into the abyss of warm darkness which is our own sensible nature. That is not a darkness in which one can safely remain passive. On the other hand, if we depend too much on our imagination and emotions, we will not turn ourselves to God but will plunge into a riot of images and fabricate for ourselves our own home-made religious experience, and this too is perilous. The "turning" of our whole self to God can be achieved only by deep and sincere and simple faith, enlivened by a hope which knows that contact with God is possible, and love which desires above all things to do His will. (*Thoughts in Solitude*)

The phrase of self-conquest can come to sound odious because very often it can mean not the conquest of ourselves but a conquest *by* ourselves. A victory we have won by our own power. Over what? Precisely over what is other than ourself. Real self-conquest is the conquest of ourselves not by ourselves but by the Holy Spirit. Self-conquest is really self-surrender. Yet before we can surrender ourselves we must become ourselves. For no one can give up what he does not possess. (*Thoughts in Solitude*)

Found By Christ

Our glory and our hope—we are the Body of Christ. Christ loves us and espouses us as His own flesh. Isn't that enough for us? But we do not really believe it. No! Be content. Be content. We are the Body of Christ. We have found Him. He has found us. We are in Him. He is in us. There is nothing further to look for except the deepening of this life we already possess. Be content. (*A Search for Solitude*)

Becoming the True Self

Joan Chittister reflects on Merton's clarion call for becoming your "true self:"

Merton's continuing insistence that there is no real spiritual development until we plumb the depths of the self to determine who we are--without the masks, without the labels—is a call to honesty and to self-criticism. . . . In this world, life becomes a matter of creating images of who I aspire to be rather than setting out to understand who I really am. What really drives me, what I really think and want and care about are the raw materials of me. It is out of these things that the self emerges, shapes and forms itself and finally, finally, finally comes to fullness. What Merton calls us to do as part of this slow but fulfilling process depends on the raw and ruthless debunking of the self to the self that is the ground of humility. He challenges us all to cling to the reality that is ourselves rather than enshroud ourselves in the cosmetic world around us, mere specters of who we are each meant to become. He calls us to the most daring truth of all, the truth of who we really are. In the center of the self. In the heart of us. Behind the veils. (*What We Have To Be Is What We Are: Merton's Unfinished Agenda in We Are Already One: Thomas Merton's Message of Hope--Reflections to Honor His Centenary*)