

FOREWORD

This book, imagined and brought forth by Kathleen Deignan, gathers together some of the most beautiful and insightful passages in the writings of Thomas Merton arranged as prayers to be offered at the dawn, midday, dusk, and night hours of each day. The result is a contemporary version of the ancient form of prayer book called a Book of Hours. You will have to find out for yourself how using this Book of Hours might enhance your own spiritual journey. But sometimes by swapping stories, we who journey together on the spiritual path can encourage and help one another along. In this spirit, then, I will share with you how the spiritual path embodied in this book continues to transform my life.

I first began to read Thomas Merton in 1958. Being only fourteen years old at the time, I was too young to appreciate much of what Merton was saying. But I was able to sense that Merton's words about God came from his own deep experience of God. In a vague but sincere way, I sensed that reading Thomas Merton might help me find my way to God. When I graduated from high school I entered the Trappist monastery of the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky, where Merton lived. My master plan was to enter the monastery so that Merton might guide me in my search for God. And, amazingly enough, that is just what happened. As a novice under Merton's care in his role as master of novices, I met with Merton on a regular basis for one-on-one spiritual direction.

What I treasure the most in my moments with Merton is not any specific thing he said. Rather, what I treasure most is that everything he said amounted to an invitation to join him in listening to God in silence. It is this invitation that I hear in each passage of this book. I hope that as you pray with this book, you will hear Merton extending this invitation to you as well, inviting you to listen in silence, surrender to the silence, discover for yourself how patiently God waits in silence for all your inner noise to exhaust itself, so that, finally, impoverished and spent, you can begin to hear God uttering you and all things into being.

You do not have to search very hard to discover this invitation to listen that reverberates in everything that Merton says. You will discover this call to listen as you slowly linger with his word, so as not to pass right over the hidden treasure he invites you to discover. What is so disarming is that as you learn to listen you begin to realize this treasure is God's very presence within you, uttering you into being as someone God eternally treasures.

As we learn to read Merton in this way, the pauses between the sentences become longer. The silence, engendered by a single thought-stopping phrase, deepens. In this attentive silence we begin to realize that God's still, small voice, reverberating in Merton's words, is reverberating within ourselves and within every passing hour of our lives. This, then, is the spirit in which I hope you sit with the prayers, poems, and psalms of Thomas Merton—not looking simply for information, nor even for inspiration, but rather for the stop-dead-in-your-track one-liners that send you falling into the depths of silence you cannot name or claim or understand.

Sitting with Merton's writings in this way, you just might begin to sense that he is speaking directly to you when he says:

It is not easy to try and say what I know I cannot say. I do really have the feeling that you have seen something most precious—and most available too. The reality that is present to us and in us: Call it Being, call it Atman, call it Pnuma . . . or Silence. And the simple fact that by being attentive, by learning to listen (or recovering the natural capacity to listen which cannot be learned any more than breathing), we can find ourselves engulfed in such happiness that it cannot be explained: the happiness of being at one with everything that is hidden in the ground of Love for which there can be no explanations. I suppose what makes me most glad is that we recognize each other in this metaphysical space of silence and happiness, and get some sense, for a moment, that we are “full of paradise without knowing it.”¹

We do not know we are full of paradise because we are so full of our own noise that we cannot hear God singing us and all things into being. And so Merton shows us the way home. He surrenders to God in silence. He surrenders so completely to God's silence that when he begins to speak, his voice and God's voice merge in a polyphony of grace and glory that causes our own heart to begin to stir and awaken.

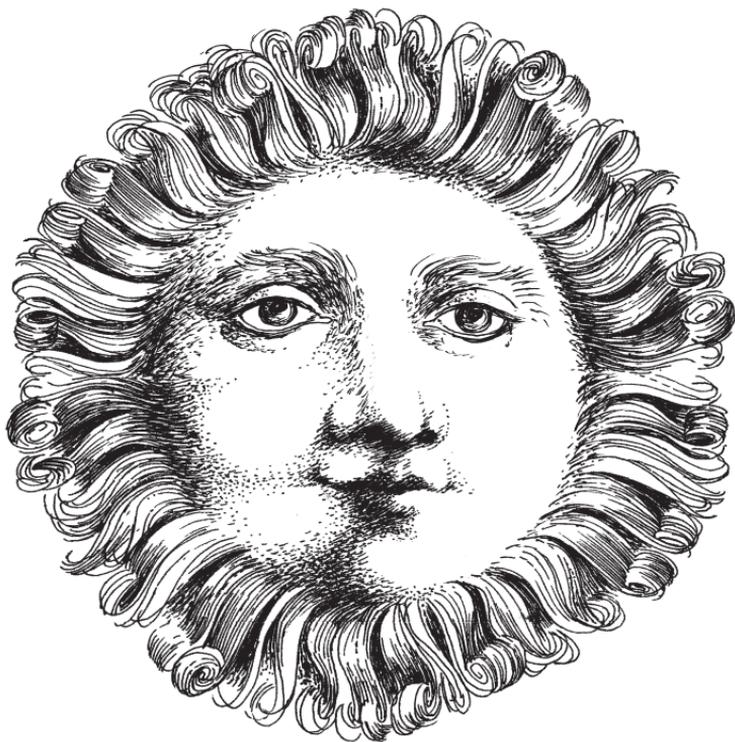
It is at this juncture that we can appreciate how the content of this book so seamlessly merges with its structure as a Book of Hours. For it is hour by hour that we learn to hear

the polyphony of God reverberating in everything we hear. It is hour by hour we learn not to believe in and blurt out the off key comments that come out of the exiled places in our own head. It is hour by hour that we come to discover that the apparent cacophony of phones ringing, of traffic going by, of so many people saying so many things, is the polyphony of God's voice reverberating in the world. As we learn to recognize and listen to this polyphony, we are transformed. As we are transformed, we begin to realize that "we are full of paradise without knowing it."

And so here you are holding in your hands a way to join Merton on the listening path. I sense Thomas Merton is somehow nearby, waiting in each thing he says to encourage you not to doubt all that God might achieve in you, all that God might express through you, as you surrender to God in silence.

JAMES FINLEY

S U N D A Y





DUSK

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*Eternity is in the present. Eternity is in
the palm of the hand.*

OPENING VERSE



h pour your darkness and your brightness
over all our solemn valleys,
You skies: and travel like the gentle Virgin,
Toward the planets' stately setting.

EVENING HYMN

My soul, O God, from Your fountains fill my will with fire.
Shine on my mind, "be darkness to my experience,"
occupy my heart with your tremendous Life.
Let my eyes see nothing in the world but Your glory,
and let my hands touch nothing that is not for Your service.
Let my tongue taste no bread that does not strengthen me
to praise Your great mercy.
I will hear Your voice and I will hear all harmonies You
have created,
singing Your hymns to find joy in giving You glory.

ΑΠΤΙΡΗΟΠ

Go out from yourself with all that one is, which is nothing,
and pour out that nothingness in gratitude that God is who
He is.

PSALM

The Lord plays and diverts Himself in the garden
of His creation,
and if we could let go of our own obsession
with what we think is the meaning of it all,
we might be able to hear His call
and follow Him in His mysterious, cosmic dance.

For the world and time are the dance of the Lord
in emptiness.

The silence of the spheres is the music of a wedding feast.

The more we persist in misunderstanding
the phenomena of life,
the more we analyze them out into strange finalities
and complex purposes of our own,
the more we involve ourselves in sadness, absurdity
and despair.

But it does not matter much,
because no despair of ours can alter the reality of things,
or stain the joy of the cosmic dance which is always there.

Indeed we are in the midst of it, and it is in the midst of us,
for it beats in our very blood, whether we want it to or not.

Yet the fact remains that we are invited to forget ourselves
on purpose,
cast our awful solemnity to the winds and join in
the general dance.

PSALM PRAYER

O perfect Word!
Whose Name is: “Savior,”
Whom we desire to hold;
Burn in our hearts, burn in our living marrow,
own our being,
Hide us and heal us in the hug of Thy delight,
Whose admirable might
Sings in the furnace of the Triple Glory!

EPISTLE

It is not easy to try to say what I know I cannot say.
I do really have the feeling that you have seen something
most precious—and most available too. The reality that is
present to us and in us: call it Being, call it *Atman*, call it
Pneuma . . . or Silence.
And the simple fact that by being attentive, by learning to
listen
(or recovering the natural capacity to listen which cannot be
learned any more than breathing),
we can find ourself engulfed in such happiness that it cannot
be explained:
the happiness of being at one with everything in that hidden
ground of Love for which there can be no explanations.

I suppose what makes me most glad is that we all recognize each other in this metaphysical space of silence and happiness, and get some sense, for a moment, that we are full of paradise without knowing it.

Well, this is an attempt at answering all of you and saying that I am so happy that you enjoyed reading things I had written. May we all grow in grace and peace, and not neglect the silence that is printed in the center of our being.

It will not fail us. It is more than silence.

Jesus spoke of the spring of living water, you remember.

SILENCE

RESPONSORY

Her love shapes worlds, shapes history, forms an Apocalypse
in me and around me:
gives birth to the City of God.

MARIAN CANTICLE

Go, roads, to the four quarters of our quiet distance,
While you, full moon, wise queen,
Begin your evening journey to the hills of heaven,
And travel no less stately in the summer sky
Than Mary, going to the house of Zachary.

The woods are silent with the sleep of doves,
The valleys with the sleep of streams,
And all our barns are happy with peace of cattle
gone to rest.

Still wakeful, in the fields, the shocks of wheat
Preach and say prayers:
You sheaves, make all your evensongs as sweet as ours,
Whose summer world, all ready for the granary and barn,
Seems to have seen, this day,
Into the secret of the Lord's Nativity.

Now at the fall of night, you shocks
Still bend your heads like kind and humble kings
The way you did this golden morning when you saw
 God's Mother passing,
While all our windows fill and sweeten
With the mild vespers of the hay and barley.

You moon and rising stars, pour on our barns and houses
Your gentle benedictions.
Remind us how our Mother, with far subtler
 and more holy influence,
Blesses our rooves and eaves,
Our shutters, lattices and sills,
Our doors, and floors, and stairs, and rooms,
 and bedrooms,
Smiling by night upon her sleeping children:
O gentle Mary! Our lovely Mother in heaven!

INTERCESSIONS

Almighty and merciful God, Father of all, Creator and Ruler of the Universe, Lord of History, whose designs are inscrutable, whose glory is without blemish, whose compassion for the errors of men is inexhaustible, in your will is our peace.

In this fatal moment of choice in which we might begin
the patient architecture of peace

We may also take the last step across the rim of chaos.

Save us then from our obsessions! Open our eyes,
dissipate confusions,

Teach us to understand ourselves and our adversary!

Grant us to seek peace where it is truly found!

In your will, O God, is our peace!

CLOSING PRAYER

This is the land where you have given me roots in eternity,
O God of heaven and earth.

This is the burning promised land, the house of God,
the gate of heaven,

the place of peace,

the place of silence,

the place of wrestling with the angel.