

Quotes of Thomas Merton

A Prayer of Unknowing

“My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think that I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you
does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore will I trust you always,
though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.”

Mystical Experience

“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*

“The new fervor will be rooted not in asceticism but in humanism,” Merton wrote in his journal.

“The beginning of love is to let those we love be perfectly themselves and not to twist them to fit our own image. Otherwise, we love only the reflection of ourselves we find in them.”

“To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to the violence of our times.”

“Meeting with God does not come to man in order that he may concern himself with God, but in order that he may confirm that there is meaning in the world.... All revelation is summons and sending.... God remains present to you when you have been sent forth; he who goes on a mission has always God before him: the truer the fulfillment the stronger and more constant his nearness. He cannot concern himself directly with God but he can converse with Him.”

Quote of James Finley

“If we are absolutely grounded in the absolute love of God that protects us from nothing even as it sustains us in all things, then we can face all things with courage and tenderness and touch the hurting places in others and in ourselves with love.”

Quote of Frederick Buechner

[I]f I were called upon to state in a few words the essence of everything I was trying to say both as a novelist and as a preacher, it would be something like this: Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and pain of it no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace. ~ *Now and Then*

Poem by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

The One Great Story

“There are so many ways to hold and be held.” —James Crews, *“The World Loves You Back”*

“Assume belonging.” —Augusta Kantra

There are so many ways to hold and be held.
Like the way the white and black cat holds my lap
even as I hold her small weight.
Like the way a woman holds a canyon in her heart—
its red rock cliffs and snow-thick spruce—
even as the canyon holds her.
And when I hold silence and offer it my whole attention,
I feel how silence holds me,
cradles me with such profound nothing
it becomes everything.
What if we assume we belong?
Then we might find we are held
by strands of birdsong, by the even beat
of eagle’s wings, by the blue moonlight
that reflects off the snow.
I spent so much time worrying
about how to fit in, changing
how I dressed, how I spoke, what I did.
I somehow didn’t learn until recently
real belonging asks nothing of me
except I offer myself exactly as I am.
I become more myself when I trust I am held
as much by shadow as by light,
held by the one shared breath, by the one
infinite song, held by soil, held by sky,
held even by the human longing to be held,
held by the one great story
from which our lives cannot be unwritten.