

Daily Meditation 12/10/2022

Thomas Merton on Repose, Silence and Advent

Good morning.

We're continuing our meditations on Advent, and with its silence and darkness, this dark season of the year that we call winter.

Today we're invoking the wisdom of Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk who lived in the 20th century and died December 10, today, in 1968. A very difficult year in America when Robert Kennedy was also assassinated, and of course Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. So three giant figures in American history and spirituality, succumbed to violent deaths that year.

But Thomas Merton had a lot to say about the *via negativa*, about silence, about the apophatic divinity. In one poem I reproduce in today's reading he tells us:

*If you seek a heavenly light,
I, solitude, am your professor --*

...solitude as a professor, as a teacher, as a mentor. Think about that.

I go before you into emptiness--

...into emptiness, the whole role of emptying, gnosis and being empty, the mind-fulness that derives from mind-emptiness.

...Raise strange sounds for your new mornings--

so the hint of the *via creativa*, that there are strange sounds that arrive in silence, that have something to do perhaps with a new morning. See, arriving in the dark, arriving in the nighttime before the sun rises. And when it does, we open windows:

...opening the windows of your innermost apartment.

In this language he's telling you about not just our inner self but our innermost self; Meister Eckhart uses that language about the innermost part of the soul. And here, like in so many places in his writings in the 1960s, Thomas Merton is invoking Meister Eckhart.

For I, Solitude, am thine own self--

...thine own self. Merton very often talks about the true self versus the false self, or the external self. And, of course, Paul, too, talks about the inner self. And so does Meister Eckhart. But Merton, invoking the more contemporary psychological phrase, phrasology, the true self versus the self.

I, Solitude, am thine own self--

...so there is this, this union with the true self and solitude, and you may need solitude to get to the true self.

I, Nothingness, am thy All.

Nothingness spelled with a capital N. So again, that takes us back to the theme of emptiness, and solitude. In solitude, we taste the nothingness, we learn to live with nothingness: "I, Nothingness, am thy all." You learn to live with the paradox, the all and the nothing, the full and the empty, the mind-ful and the mind-empty, and finally,

I, Silence, am thy Amen!

...I, Silence, am thy Amen. So notice, he's taken solitude, emptiness, nothingness, silence...but it is the All, and it is an Amen.

And I was struck in picking up this poem for our daily meditation this morning, for it has two exclamation points in it. It ends with an exclamation point, the Amen, and the line, "I am solitude, your professor!" also has an exclamation point. And I realize in other of Merton's poems how frequently he invokes the exclamation point. I think he was a man of enthusiasm and excitement. When he discovered truths that he wanted to share, out come the exclamation points. And I think he's inviting us to live lives with exclamation points. And the journey into solitude assists that kind of depth and excitement and non-cynicism. Cynicism is life without exclamation points.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.