

Daily Meditation 12/12/2022

Merton on Repose, Silence, and Advent, continued

Good morning.

Today we continue our meditations with Thomas Merton on the topic we've been on for a week or 10 days now--repose or silence. It seems so integral to Advent and to winter.

In today's meditation, Merton refers to a House of Nothing. "Peace, bless this mad place."

And this is really picking up from the meditation we dwelled with on Saturday with Thomas Merton where he talked about how nothingness is also the All. But the House of Nothing that, when we turn inwards, we often find that sense of solitude but also great mystery and emptiness that can be called the House of Nothing.

And he invokes a prayer for peace. "Bless this mad place."

The House of Nothing is a place of peace, and peace itself is a blessing. And our souls, our inner selves, are also mad places. Not just places of emptiness but of madness, wildness, chaos.

"Silence, love this growth." Silence, love this growth. So he's speaking in the second person now to silence. He's making silence a companion, friend. "Oh silence, love this growth."

Remember what Meister Eckhart says, "The soul grows by subtraction, not by addition." So, subtraction is part of our growth, and silence is part of subtraction. I think he's echoing Meister Eckhart again in this phrase: "Silence love this growth. Oh silence, golden zero."

What an amazing phrase. I've had so many people, when I've shared this poem, respond to that one phrase, "golden zero." Zero can be golden. Zero does not have to be seen as a negative. That is something gold, golden zero, *doxa*, glory, gold, a golden zero.

"Unsetting sun." Unsetting sun. A sun that does not set.

"Love winter, when the plant says nothing." That's the last line of Merton's poem and it is so powerful. Winter is a time of hibernating and silence and speaking of nothing. Quiet. Solitude comes through strongly.

And then, we journey with Sister Lentfoehr, a very close friend of Meister Eckhart, and it was my privilege to invite her to speak at our school program at Mundelein College in Chicago many years ago. She told stories of picnicking with Thomas Merton and how they shared one another's poetry with each other for many, many years. She offered him criticism, good critique of his poetry. Made him a better poet. She came to our program and read his zen poetry especially.

It was a very, very rich afternoon. She sprinkled in these personal stories she had with her. But here she makes the explicit connection between Merton and Eckhart. And she talks about how Christ is finally born in us in the highest sense when we can let go of that persona that has been busy doing things-- even good things, visions and virtues, performing good works. And she says this is not the real birth of the Christ.

The real birth of the Christ is when we're finally at a point of "nowhereness," a point of nothingness in the midst of being. And it is there where the Christ is born. Where the *ancilla animae* and the spark of the soul is lit, there is the manger of the Christ. And again, we can invoke Eckart and return to our unborn self.

And that is what Advent is all about! Giving birth to the unborn self, giving birth to the Christ. The Christ that is us!

And that's the great coming, the great expectation that is baked into this season of Advent.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.