



Coalesce Podcast

Episode 034 - Soul of the Serene Disciple

Note, terms, scripture, practice



Thomas Merton (1915-1968)

The Sign of Jonas (1958)

Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander (1966)

New Seeds of Contemplation (1949)

The Seven Storey Mountain (1948)

The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton (1975)

“When in the Soul of the Serene Disciple” (poem, 1958)

When in the soul of the serene disciple
With no more Fathers to imitate
Poverty is a success,
It is a small thing to say the roof is gone:
He has not even a house.
Stars, as well as friends,
Are angry with the noble ruin,
Saints depart in several directions.
Be still:
There is no longer any need of comment.
It was a lucky wind
That blew away his halo with his cares,
A lucky sea that drowned his reputation.
Here you will find
Neither a proverb nor a memorandum.
There are no ways,
No methods to admire
Where poverty is no achievement.
His God lives in his emptiness like an affliction.
What choice remains?
Well, to be ordinary is not a choice:
It is the usual freedom
Of men [and women] without [their] visions.

[Mark 8:35](#)

[Galatians 5:16-24](#)

[John 1:13](#)

[Luke 24:40](#)

Practice: Play

Read the following passage by Thomas Merton, from his book *New Seeds of Contemplation*, slowly, imaginatively. Picture the scenes he describes using all your senses. Recall times when you have witnessed God at play, moments when you have joined in the “general dance.” Make space in your day or in the coming week to intentionally forget your small self and participate in the universal joy of simply being alive.

What is serious to men is often very trivial in the sight of God. What in God might appear to us as “play” is perhaps what he Himself takes most seriously. At any rate, 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. We do not have to go very far to catch echoes of that game, and of that dancing. When we are alone on a starlit night; when by chance we see the migrating birds in autumn descending on a grove of junipers to rest and eat; when we see children in a moment when they are really children; when we know love in our own hearts; or when, like the Japanese poet Bashō we hear an old frog land in a quiet pond with a solitary splash—at such times the awakening, the turning inside out of all values, the “newness,” the emptiness and the purity of vision that make themselves evident, provide a glimpse of the 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. [1]

[1] Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (Shambhala: 2003), 302-303.