

Joan Chittister

# THE MONASTIC WAY

JUNE 2022

*i thank You, God, for most this amazing day:  
for the leaping greenly spirits of trees  
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything  
which is natural which is infinite which is yes.*

-E.E. CUMMINGS

## YES TO LIFE AGAIN

Where I live, winter is a raw and bitter, wind-swept and white, unpredictable and uncompromising time of year. We go from dry, cold, grey days to deep, wet frozen days. The pavement turns from white snow to black ice from one moment to the other. The wind howls around the house, whipping wet leaves and soft snowflakes with it. One black night everything in sight is fogged in dark; the next morning even the inner city is clear and clean and deep, deep white. Then we stay inside, make popcorn, light the fire, curl up in blankets and play games.

Indeed, winter, for us, is an experience in the struggles of life, in its twists and turns, in its great challenges and small triumphs. We watch where we walk now, we cling to hand rails from place to place, we drive slowly, deliberately, cautiously from corner to corner. We go through life more thoughtfully, more quietly, more prudently—with an eye to what might happen as well as for what is happening. We manage it all quite well, of course, but not cavalierly. Every step in life demands attention then.

Finally, in the north, finally, one day, almost without warning, Spring comes. You smell it. You taste it in the air. You watch pregnant trees explode with new bloom. Suddenly. And you know. You know that life has changed, that life is new again.

Around the neighborhood, the windows begin to open, one at a time, tentatively at first, one here, then another one there. Then all at once, it seems, the street is open and bold with life.

Children appear in the middle of the road, bouncing balls, laughing loudly. The corner ice-cream stand, weeks early, opens and calls the children out of their small, old houses like the Pied Piper of play. And all us older people feel our limbs loosen a bit and our hearts begin to smile.



It is an exercise in “yes,” this slip-slide from winter to spring. Yes to today; yes to tomorrow; yes to life again. We all come out of the tomb of winter, new and bright with promise. It is “yes” to life time now, however old, however jaded we may be. It is the rediscovery of possibility again.

The turn of the seasons in the north is a kaleidoscope of the seasons of life, of the face of God in time, of the very process of what it means to be alive.

In the seasons we see the story of ourselves played out: early on, life without shape; later, life in pursuit of direction; finally, life on the way to its horizon; at the end, life, mellowed, going down into the sea of eternity. Through all of them, like warp and woof, lies the essential pattern, the obligation to say “yes.”

Yes, yes, yes life teaches us to say. Yes, yes, yes, we must learn to say back. Otherwise, we will surely die long before we have ever learned to live.



If the monastic life teaches us anything, it teaches us to seek God, to find God everywhere. The monastic learns that God speaks to the heart in many tongues. This year's *Monastic Way* looks at the insights of great writers and asks the question, What of God is in this for me?

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**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 1:** Ignoring the problems of life is not a solution to them. It is not “yes” to the challenge of the day. It is, at best, only a charade, a game of pretend. As G.K. Chesterton said, “It isn’t that they can’t see the solution. It is that they can’t see the problem.”

**THURSDAY, JUNE 2:** Remember that life is to be lived—all of it, in all of its layers and longings. Only then will we ever know our own strength and depth of soul.

**FRIDAY, JUNE 3:** When we learn to see every flower, hear every bird, we will be closer than we have ever been to being fully alive.

**SATURDAY, JUNE 4:** There are those who keep the same look on their face for every event in life—birth, death, quiet, noise, crowds and individuals. Pity them. They are cardboard cutouts of a person.

**SUNDAY, JUNE 5:** For the person who has really said “yes” to life, it is all equally exciting—as much in the ghetto as in the gated estate.

**MONDAY, JUNE 6:** Those have not said “yes” to life are those who accept it only on their own terms.

**TUESDAY, JUNE 7:** Life is not to be rationed, parceled out, allotted in sensible pieces—a bit of fun, a touch of joy, a glance at love, as little as possible of sorrow. It is to be lived to the hilt, experienced, accepted. “The only thing better than singing,” Ella Fitzgerald said, “is more singing.”

**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 8:** Say “yes” to all of life. Say it loudly. Say it fully. Say it with faith that winter cannot last forever and spring comes in strange and sudden guise.

**THURSDAY, JUNE 9:** When life begins with “It’s impossible,” be sure that life will go on—but it will be impossible. “A strong positive mental attitude will create more miracles than any wonder drug,” the recovered stroke victim, Patricia Neal said. And a little faith that the God of yesterday will be the God of tomorrow won’t hurt either.

**FRIDAY, JUNE 10:** The frame of mind we take to every part of life will have a great deal to do with the way it affects us.

**SATURDAY, JUNE 11:** “Two men looked out from prison bars,” the poem reads. “One saw mud and the other saw stars.” Which says to us: How do you see your life? The answer to that simple question determines whether you are a happy person or a dour one.

**NO, LIFE IS NOT PREDICTABLE,  
BUT IT IS LIVABLE  
IF WE ONLY CONCENTRATE  
ON WHAT WE HAVE MORE  
THAN ON WHAT WE WANT.**

**SUNDAY, JUNE 12:** The only difference between winter and spring, between snow and flowers, between hot and cold is the way we look at each of them. But, oh how long it takes to learn that. And some people never do.

**MONDAY, JUNE 13:** The thing about our winter is that it snows. The thing about spring is that it rains. The thing about summer is that it’s sweltering hot. The thing about autumn is that it’s dark and cold. Isn’t it wonderful? All of it. Every single different thing that makes us adjust and enjoy and live life differently.

**TUESDAY, JUNE 14:** There was a time when we thought that what happened to us determined the quality of our life. Now we know that it’s what we think about our experiences that make the difference. “The greatest discovery of my generation,” William James, the great psychologist wrote, “is that a human being can alter their life by altering their attitudes of mind.”

**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 15:** The personality we bring to life each day determines the climate of it for everyone else. “An optimist,” Susan Bissonette wrote, “is the human personification of spring.”

**THURSDAY, JUNE 16:** It takes a bit of courage to face the seasons, to dress for them properly, to find something we like to do in each of them, to get up the energy to go out into them, head up, shoulders back and smiling. In fact, it’s finding something right about every day of our lives that makes each of them either a positive or a negative event. The choice is ours.

**FRIDAY, JUNE 17:** The way we face the day is the kind of day it will be for other people around us. “Attitudes are contagious,” Dennis and Wendy Man-nering wrote. “Are yours worth catching?”

**SATURDAY, JUNE 18:** Most of us don’t say “yes” to life at all. Instead, we say either “no,” or worse, “I refuse.” Then we wonder why other people are so much happier than we are.

**SUNDAY, JUNE 19:** Some people can go through a rose garden looking like they smell something bad. Now, I ask you, is that the fault of the rose?

**MONDAY, JUNE 20:** Oscar Wilde, the Irish writer, put it this way: “If you don’t get everything you want, think of the things you don’t get that you don’t want.” Point: Life is a lot better than it could be. Maybe we ought to be glad we got what we did.

**TUESDAY, JUNE 21:** It’s the way we live the life we have that makes the difference between what we don’t have and what we could have and what we do have.

**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 22:** No, life is not predictable, but it is livable if we only concentrate on what we have more than on what we want. “Life is a shipwreck,” Voltaire wrote, “but we must not forget to sing in the life-boats.”

**THURSDAY, JUNE 23:** We live life well only by throwing ourselves into it. As Dag Hammarskjöld puts it, “We are not permitted to choose the frame of our destiny. But what we put into it is our own.”

**FRIDAY, JUNE 24:** A Wednesday in winter and a Wednesday in spring are exactly the same day. The only thing that makes them different is the attitude we bring to them. The philosopher Camus teaches us all to evaluate ourselves more than we do the situation when he writes, “In the depth of winter I finally learned that there was in me an invincible summer.”

**SATURDAY, JUNE 25:** The truth is that no one has the perfect life—

except those who are perfectly committed to make the best of the one they have.

**SUNDAY, JUNE 26:** The trick to having a happy life is to remember that it all comes down to what we ourselves make of the life we have. “The sun shines and warms and lights us and we have no curiosity to know why this is so,” Ralph Waldo Emerson says, “but we ask the reason of all evil, of pain, and hunger and mosquitoes and silly people.”

**WHEN WE LEARN  
TO SEE EVERY FLOWER,  
HEAR EVERY BIRD,  
WE WILL BE CLOSER  
THAN WE HAVE EVER BEEN  
TO BEING FULLY ALIVE.**

**MONDAY, JUNE 27:** It’s not the thing we’re facing that counts. It’s the way we look at the thing we’re facing—the long commute across town, the change of jobs, the loss of the promotion, the schedule—that

makes all the difference in what it does to us. “It’s so hard when I have to,” Annie Gottlier writes, “and so easy when I want to.”

**TUESDAY, JUNE 28:** How is it that we find ourselves doing the very same thing that other people are doing but they are glad to do it and we’re not. Easy. “We are all in the gutter,” Oscar Wilde writes, “but some of us are looking at the stars.”

**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 29:** One of the major obstacles to saying “yes” to life may be that we mistake the accidentals of life for the essence of life. Or to put it another way, “Enjoy the little things,” Robert Brault says, “for one day you may look back and realize they were the big things.”

**THURSDAY, JUNE 30:** An anonymous philosopher wrote once: “Anywhere is paradise; it’s up to you.”



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## LET’S SHARE OUR THOUGHTS

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The following discussion questions, Scripture echoes, journal prompts, and prayer are meant to help you reflect more deeply on *The Monastic Way*. Choose at least two suggestions and respond to them. You may do it as a personal practice or gather a group interested in sharing the spiritual journey. Once a month, *The Monastic Way* staff will convene a Zoom conference where you can share your insights. Three times a year Sister Joan Chittister will join that Zoom conference to give more input and respond to your questions and ideas regarding one issue of *The Monastic Way*.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Re-read the reflection for June 14th. Then share a time when you altered your life by changing your attitude.
2. Which daily quote in *The Monastic Way* is most meaningful to you? Why? Do you agree with it? Disagree? Did it inspire you? Challenge you? Raise questions for you?
3. After reading *The Monastic Way* write one question that you would like to ask the author about this month’s topic.
4. Joan Chittister uses other literature to reinforce and expand her writing. Find another quote, poem, story, song, art piece, novel that echoes the theme of this month’s *Monastic Way*.
5. This month say “yes” to one specific event each day—a flower in bloom, a kind word, a taste of sun, an insult, a news story. Write each “yes” on paper. Once a week share your list with a friend.



## SCRIPTURE ECHO

*And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of God;  
let it be done to me according to your word."*

—LUKE 1:38

Think back on a time when you said "yes" to a difficult or unknown situation in life.  
Share your experience.

## JOURNAL PROMPTS

**Prompt 1:** Here are a few statements from this month's *Monastic Way*. Choose one that is most helpful to you and journal with it.

- We live life well only by throwing ourselves into it.
- I thank God for this most amazing day...
- Yes to today; yes to tomorrow; yes to life again.

**Prompt 2:** Spend a few minutes with this photograph and journal about its relationship to this month's *Monastic Way*. You can do that with prose or a poem or a song or....



## PRAYER

*Transfigure us O God  
Transfigure us O God  
Break the chains that bind us.  
Speak your healing Word.  
And where you lead we'll follow.  
Transfigure us O God.*

—BOB HURD

### Joan Chittister **FUND FOR PRISONERS**

**"Prisoners are the most forgotten people in society and the least served in Christianity. Help me change that."**  
—Joan Chittister

We work with a network of prison chaplains and volunteers across the country to send thousands of free copies of *The Monastic Way* to women and men in prison. A donation of \$12.00 will send a one-year subscription to a prisoner that can:

- provide beauty to battered and bleak lives
- deliver daily positive reflective messages to stir the heart and seed the soul
- enable caring conversations that give people in prison something to believe in and a sense of the presence of God in themselves.

[www.joanchittister.org/donations](http://www.joanchittister.org/donations)

**JOAN CHITTISTER** is an internationally known author and lecturer and a clear visionary voice across all religions. She has written more than 60 books and received numerous awards for her writings and work on behalf of peace and women in the church and in society.

**KAREN BUKOWSKI**, an Erie native, is a nature photographer and former LPGA and PGA Golf Professional who holds a master's degree in public administration. Visit [karenbukowskiphotography.com](http://karenbukowskiphotography.com) to find many nature and landscape photographs.

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