

THE MONASTIC WAY

...daily insights to stir the heart and seed the soul.

O COME LET US ADORE...

What we adore in life is what determines the quality of our lives. To adore money is to live in unrelenting, unsatisfied greed. To adore sex is to live in restless lust devoid of love, centered in the pleasures of the self. To adore power is to live in fear of the loss of it and out of touch with the gifts of those around us. Those things become more and more obvious as life goes by.

But even religion can make itself a replacement for life in God. In fact, a kind of pseudo-holiness can be a very clever substitution of the self for the real goal of life. We can stop far short of holiness in a self-satisfying morass of false piety.

Notice, for instance, who is at the manger.

Better yet, notice who is not at the manger. There are no potentates here, none of the privileged, no social elites, not even any great religious figures from the Temple. Just shepherds.

What's wrong with this picture? What's wrong is that shepherds are one of the lowest ranks of early society. Unlike land-owning farmers, shepherds were wage-earning nomads, hired hands, nobodies. It is these who were attached to nothing in either town or temple who could recognize goodness when they saw it in the most unusual of places in the most unusual of people while

thousands adored at other shrines in life and did not.

I adore the fearless, kind, embracing, challenging Jesus. Therefore, I am not fit for anything, not even a church, that purports to be a surrogate for the center of life. Any church that wants us to bow down and say, "You, the Church, are God"

asks us to adore something less than God.

With the shepherds who were the first to see Jesus, to hear in their hearts the anthem of his arrival, I can only say in my heart that God is God. And even more:

SUE DOUBET, OSB

though Jesus may be male,

God who is "pure spirit," they tell us, is not. Not even in a church that makes God so.

No doubt about it: What we adore in life determines who we are and what we become in the life-long search for the God who is searching for us. To be the fullness of what God means for us to be, we must beware of letting anything less dim that in us.



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1: False idols are everywhere these days: in newspapers, on TV ads, on billboards, in magazines, in the margins of every website, even on the phone. They are meant to excite us and arrest us and, they hope, seduce us. It's not what we pass up because we can't afford it that counts. It's what we pass up because we don't need it even when we can afford it. Then we know we are free.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2: It's important to be aware of what consumes us in life. That's the only way we have a clue about what we might be missing. Then we get to make some choices to do other things.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3: To be alive means to be alert to everything around us: not dull to some, dead to others, uncaring of the rest. Life has to do with doing more of what gives a sense of new energy to every part of us. It also means, then, that we must learn to do less of what does not—to what only robotizes our bodies or deadens our minds and souls.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 4: To worship at the shrine of an addiction, any addiction, is to give ourselves over to what we think we control but which will eventually control us instead.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 5: Addictions seduce because at first it seems that they sweeten what is already dead in us. Wild shopping or heavy drinking or soothing drugs take away the pain of what we refuse to address otherwise. It's when we start coming down the other side of them that the pain sets in and we find ourselves in chains.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6: To be in thrall to anything is to miss the rest of everything in life. "The truly important things in life—love, beauty, and one's own uniqueness—are constantly," Pablo Casals says, "being overlooked." But what we overlook is always what we're missing in life.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7: Too much openness is every bit as bad as too much rigidity in life. It's learning to say both yes and no to everything that is the real secret to the good life. "The trick is in what one emphasizes," Carlos Castaneda says. "We either make ourselves miserable or we make ourselves happy. The amount of work is the same."

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8: Christmas is about making happiness—making whatever

we have all we want, all we need—rather than making accumulation the center of life.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9: When we discover the other part of life—the spiritual part of life—all the false shrines we've built lose their luster. Then our eyes are opened and we begin to see everything we do have rather than everything we don't.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10: God is everywhere but it is the shepherds of life—the simple ones, the steady ones, the ones who live closest to earth and move closer to heaven at the same time—who can tell what is real from what is bogus. It is these types who love the world of things but never fail to develop the world of the spirit at the same time.

*The awareness that
there is more,
that there must be more,
is the proof of God
planted in our hearts.*

MONDAY, DECEMBER 11: It's important to love something in life; it is equally important not to try to capture it. Let life fly from tree to tree along the way.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12: The love of life leads to a love of worship, of relationship with the Giver of the Gift of Life. "It is in the process of being worshipped," C.S. Lewis writes, "that God communicates the divine presence to humanity."

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13: We become what we adore: sodden with indulgence or bursting with life. "Worship," Jack Hayford writes, "changes the worshipper into the image of the One worshipped." That's why it is so important to decide where, to what, and to whom we build our idols.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 14: As we go from one altar of worship to another we are really only looking for God. It is what we make our gods out of, however, that determines the kind of person we ourselves will be. The mystic, Julian of Norwich says of the process: "Until I am essentially united with God, I can never have full rest or real happiness."

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15: Agitation, the constant need for more and other

and still more, is a signal of the restless heart, the soul without boundaries, the spirit without a center. "Home," Emily Dickinson says, "is the definition of God." Then, when, like the shepherds, we attach ourselves to the purpose of life, rather than its superfluities, we know that the journey has been worth it...and peace comes.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16: What surprised the shepherds was not that the Messiah would come or the angels had called them or the divine presence was in a baby. What surprised them was that God had come to the very place where they had always been. The process is the same for us. Wherever we go to find Life, the fact is that Life is already within us if we will only attend to it.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17: It is coming to see the wonders around us that leads to a wonder-full life. As the Sufi poet Hafiz says of it: "Slipping on my shoes, boiling water, toasting bread, buttering the sky: That should be enough contact with God in one day to make anyone crazy."

MONDAY, DECEMBER 18: Don't be disturbed because you can't explain God, or see God, or understand God, or capture God on the end of a star. The very fact you realize there is a mystery is itself enough of an answer to the universe.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 19: The awareness that there is more, that there must be more, is the proof of God planted in our hearts. It is the search for that God who is already with us that leads us to worship at altars made of clay along the way.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 20: It is doubt itself that is the foundation of faith. "At the moment you are most in awe of all there is about life that you don't understand," Jane Wagner writes, "you are closer to understanding it all than at any other time." When we are finally no longer sure of all the answers, we are open to recognizing the final one.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21: The Mystery we call God is all around us. Everywhere. The great lesson of the spiritual life is to learn to drink it in, in all its colors, all its shapes, all its tastes. "O taste and see that the Lord is good," the scriptures teach. It's just a matter of learning to love each of the many ways of tasting the God in whose mystery we dwell. "One cannot speak about

mystery,” René Magritte writes. “One must be seized by it.”

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 22: We spend so much time in life struggling to find a secret key by which to experience God when all we need is to appreciate the God who dwells in us and with us where we are. Richard Kehl tells a story about the Buddha: Siddhartha Guatama once cried out in pity for a yogi by the river who had wasted twenty years of his human existence in learning how to walk on water, when the ferryman might have taken him across for a small coin. Point: God is all around us—just waiting for us to notice.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24: Where is God? There. No, here. All at once particular and universal, seen and unseen, present and absent. As Lorenz Oken puts it: “The universe is the language of God.”

MONDAY, DECEMBER 25: If God is all Being, then we are swimming, all together and at once, in the very womb of God. What can possibly be more real, more exciting? Only then can we be caught up, wide-eyed, like shepherds in front of a baby, with the awesome thunderous awareness of the invisible God.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 26: It is so easy to get immersed in what is outside of us that we ignore entirely what is inside of

us, calling us, prodding us on, companionship as we go.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 27: God is not “out there” anymore than God is “in here.” God is beyond place and by that very fact is everywhere. It is not God who does not come to us. We are the ones who are missing in action.

*It's important to be
aware of what
consumes us in life.
That's the only way
we have a clue about
what we might be missing.
Then we get to make some
choices to do other things.*

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 28: Instead of giving our lives over to life, we give them away to things that do not matter, do not last, are at best passing, reduce us to living in chains we make for ourselves: clothes, jewelry, money, status, power, drugs, alcohol—all of them good and all of them temporary and all of them dangerous if taken to extremes.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 29: In the adoration of the Christ Child, we see

what it is to be captivated by the magnet that is God. Then the kind of life that enjoys life begins.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 30: When we get to the point in life that we realize that things have almost nothing to do with happiness, joy takes over and peace comes to stay. Thomas Merton says, “Life is this simple: we are living in a world that is absolutely transparent and God is shining through it all the time.... If we abandon ourselves to God and forget ourselves, we see it sometimes, and we see it maybe frequently.”

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 31: Christmas isn't a holiday. Christmas is a way of being alive. “Christmas is not a time nor a season,” Calvin Coolidge said. “It is a state of mind. To cherish peace and goodwill, to be plenteous in mercy is to have the real spirit of Christmas.” Merry Christmas to you all—every day of the year.



LET'S SHARE OUR THOUGHTS

The following discussion questions, Scripture echo, 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.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Draw a shrine and place on it three things you have given most of your thoughts, energy, time, and commitment to acquiring or achieving. Write a 100 word reflection on your “shrine.”
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 world is indeed a holy place.... Venite Adoremus (come, let us adore),” wrote Teilhard de Chardin. Do you agree that the world is “a holy place” worthy of your veneration? Explain.

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.

- It's important to be aware of what consumes us in life.
- It is doubt itself that is the foundation of faith.
- It is the search for that God who is already with us that leads us to worship at altars made of clay along the way.

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...



SUE DOUBET, OSB

SCRIPTURE ECHO

"All rulers will pay homage, And all nations will serve your anointed."
—ROMANS 72:11

Can you imagine what it would look like if all leaders acted out of a sense of reverence for God?

PRAYER

"Into this world, this demented inn
in which there is absolutely no room for him at all,
Christ comes uninvited.
But because he cannot be at home in it,
because he is out of place in it,
and yet he must be in it,
His place is with the others for whom
there is no room.
His place is with those who do not belong,
who are rejected by power, because
they are regarded as weak,
those who are discredited,
who are denied status of persons,
who are tortured, bombed and exterminated.
With those for whom there is no room,
Christ is present in this world."
—THOMAS MERTON

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

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.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Each month, join the staff of Benetvision on a free Zoom call to discuss the current issue of *The Monastic Way*. Several times each year, Sister Joan leads the Zoom session. Subscribers will receive invitations to register for these calls in their email inbox.

The Monastic Way Vol. 32 No. 12
Free online subscriptions at
www.joanchittister.org

© 2023 Joan Chittister: Benetvision

355 East 9th St
Erie PA 16503-1107
T: 814-459-5994
benetvision@benetvision.org

No part of this publication may be reprinted without prior permission of the publisher. Benetvision is an outreach of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie.

www.joanchittister.org