



Thursday 10 December 2020

Thomas Merton was a Trappist monk, mystic and spiritual writer, and initiated much interfaith work. He also called for justice for the poor, the forgotten, and the marginalised. He described each aspect with exceptional clarity.

Merton is, however, best known as one of the twentieth century's greatest writers of spirituality. He had a keen, curious mind, and was gifted at communicating his insights concerning the practice of prayer and spirituality. Many people find his personal spiritual journey is his most compelling legacy. His mother died when he was young, leaving a gaping emotional gap in his life. His father was a talented though eccentric artist but was largely absent, which intensified the boy's loneliness.

This emptiness drove him toward self-destruction: anxiety and rage; heavy drinking; promiscuous relationships; frivolous spending. But in the midst of this recklessness, he came to Christ like the Prodigal Son coming to his senses. It was profound, redeeming, and life changing.

He died on 10 December 1968 aged only 53 years of age.

- All the Bible readings come from the *New Revised Standard Version*.
- The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration have been included at the end rather than in situ because many following the service will be in isolation and unable to celebrate the sacrament.
- The hymns are YouTube links. To hear the hymns please hover the mouse over each link, press Ctrl and then return.
- To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page, <http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 Come and see the King of Love (click on this link to hear the hymn)

The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

The Preparation

**All Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Christ calls us to share the heavenly banquet of his love with all the saints in earth and heaven. Therefore, knowing our unworthiness and sin, let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God’s commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

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Sermon © Revd Dr Paul Monk.

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

It's usual to omit the Gloria during Advent

The Collect for Thomas Merton

Gracious God,
you called your monk Thomas Merton
to proclaim your justice out of silence,
and moved him in his contemplative writings
to perceive and value Christ at work in the faiths of others:
Keep us, like him,
steadfast in the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ;
who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah

It shall be said,

‘Build up, build up, prepare the way,

remove every obstruction from my people’s way.’

For thus says the high and lofty one

who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:

‘I dwell in the high and holy place,

and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit,

to revive the spirit of the humble,

and to revive the heart of the contrite.

For I will not continually accuse,

nor will I always be angry;

for then the spirits would grow faint before me,

even the souls that I have made.

Because of their wicked covetousness I was angry;

I struck them, I hid and was angry;

but they kept turning back to their own ways.

I have seen their ways, but I will heal them;

I will lead them and repay them with comfort,

creating for their mourners the fruit of the lips.

Peace, peace, to the far and the near, says the Lord;

and I will heal them.’ *Isaiah 57:14-19*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul’s Letter to the Colossians

I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I am saying this so that no one may deceive you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, and I rejoice to see your morale and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority.

Colossians 2:2-10

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 Bind us together Lord [\(please click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

All Glory to you O Lord.

Jesus said, 'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—"Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. The crowd answered him, 'We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?' Jesus said to them, 'The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.'

After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them. *John 12:27-36*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

Thomas Merton was an accomplished philosopher, linguist, and poet. He was a prolific author who wrote nearly fifty books. He seemed to know everyone in the 1950s and '60s so his collected correspondence, when published, required four large volumes. Yet he was a Trappist monk and felt called to live a secluded life.

Reading Merton's writing charts the way he viewed his life as one long battle: to get closer to God. There therefore left the world to become a monk in an austere Trappist monastery. He sought to renounce the desires and impulses that drew him away from God. He wanted to spend his time in prayer in an increasingly desperate attempt to draw closer to God. He wanted to renounce self to make way for God. As the beatitude says, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit for they will see God.'

Merton was writing, analysing and corresponding all this time, so we can chronicle his quest, his activities, and the ways he sought to serve God. It's now clear that he was indeed becoming ever more Christlike. But the Holy Spirit living in his soul was telling him to look outward, engaging with the world he felt called to renounce.

Near the end of his short life, Merton realised that he had fallen into the classic trap: 'God is love' (1 John 4) so love is the fuel that enables a person of faith to grow into Christlikeness. But we receive that love in proportion that we give it away. We only grow in Godliness because we give away the love of God to those we meet.

The link in the chain that Merton discovered almost too late is that if we are to channel the love of God, *that love needs someone to receive it*. We cannot grow in the faith in isolation nor can we grow without human contact. Growth in Christlikeness is completely inseparable from helping the needy. That love-inspired help will involve clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, giving comfort in those in need.

Prayer is to spirituality what experimental research is to science. So we can appropriate Merton's discovery and apply it to our own lives. God requires all of us to grow into Christlikeness; God therefore requires all of us to love. But perhaps Jesus got there first when he summarised the commandments, when he said, 'Love the Lord your God and love your neighbour as yourself'. He went so far as to give a new commandment, saying 'Love one another as I have loved you.' That much!

The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
the source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All We believe and trust in him.

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Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

All We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

All This is our faith.

**We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Prayers of intercession

Teach me to go to this country beyond words and beyond names.
Teach me to pray on this side of the frontier, here where these woods are.
I need to be led by you.
I need my heart to be moved by you.
I need my soul to be made clean by your prayer.
I need my will to be made strong by you.
I need the world to be saved and changed by you.
I need you for all those who suffer, who are in prison, in danger, in sorrow.
I need you for all the crazy people.
I need your healing hand to work always in my life.
I need you to make me, as you made your Son, a healer, a comforter, a saviour.
I need you to name the dead.
I need you to help the dying cross their particular rivers.
I need you for myself whether I live or die.
It is necessary.
Amen. *Thomas Merton*

My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.

I cannot know for certain where it will end.
nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please you
does in fact please you.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore will I trust you always though
I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and you will never leave me to face my perils alone. *Thomas Merton*

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

The peace

Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and his name shall be called the Prince of Peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 When I needed a neighbour ([click on this link to hear the hymn](#))

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

The Dismissal

May Christ who makes saints of sinners,
who has transformed those we remember today,
raise and strengthen you that you may transform the world;
and the blessing of God the Almighty:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
be with you now and remain with you always.

All **Amen.**

HYMN 4 **Brother, sister let me serve you** [\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All **In the name of Christ. Amen.**

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
And now we give thanks, most gracious God,
surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses
and glorified in the assembly of your saints.
The glorious company of apostles praise you.
The noble fellowship of prophets praise you.
The white-robed army of martyrs praise you.
We, your holy Church, acclaim you.
In communion with angels and archangels,
and with all who served you on earth and worship you now in heaven,
we raise our voice to proclaim your glory,
for ever praising you and saying:

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.

He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with Thomas Merton and all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**All Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**All Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

**All Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

All We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us. Amen.

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

God our redeemer,
who inspired Thomas Butler to witness to your love
and to work for the coming of your Kingdom:
may we, who in this sacrament share the bread of heaven,
be filled by your Spirit to proclaim the Gospel in our daily living
and never to rest content until your kingdom come,
on earth as it is in heaven;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen

All Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory. Amen.