

THE MONASTIC WAY

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

THE SACRED QUEST

Every one of us is hardwired for God. The data is clear: We know our incompleteness. We recognize our emptiness. We live with a sense of continual desire and unending dissatisfaction. And so we walk the paths of life like a Geiger counter waiting for the signal that tells us we have finally grasped the invisible, the ungraspable, the Whole.

We search ceaselessly for the more of life, contented but not fulfilled. We live with expectations of tomorrow, and then find tomorrow not enough as well. We struggle with our restlessness today. We go through life with the magnet in our souls that is meant to bring us home, wherever, in the end, home really is.

There is, for each of us, an unseeable star in life that we follow, often to false ends. We follow the star to money, but when we get the money, what we buy with it fails to fill the breach between having and wanting. We follow the star to success, but today's pinnacle is only tomorrow's memory. We follow the star to one person and then another, but, good, captivating, inspiring as they may be, none of them really fills the great gullet of the soul for long.

Then, if we live long enough, think about it deeply enough, face the problem honestly enough, we finally understand: we are born to be discontented.

Oh, life makes us happy, yes, but satisfied, no. We have here a taste of what fullness of life is meant to be, but, at the same time, there is

nothing here that quenches the thirsts or fills all the cravings. What we have here is only the hint of what we are meant to become.

At that point, we must begin to listen to the call within. We must begin to ask ourselves what it is that undergirds everything

we do, every thought we think, every step we take.

The monastic life builds the idea of the whole of life into daily life. There are regular moments of daily prayer, regularly scheduled times of sacred readings, regular periods of annual retreat, meant to bind both parts of life—spiritual and professional—together, regular interruptions in the day designed to keep fresh the idea that, whatever we do, every step we take in life is simply another step on the way to God.



KAREN BUKOWSKI



SATURDAY, MARCH 1: “If upon awakening your first thought is of God, you are a monk,” wrote Wayne Teasdale. It is reaching out into the nowhere looking for the everything that makes every one of us “a monk.”

SUNDAY, MARCH 2: Everything, the monastic knows, begins and ends with God: thought, work, relationships, goals, and purpose. God becomes the rhythm of the day, the first thought on waking, the last thought at night, the reason for everything we do in life.

MONDAY, MARCH 3: The monastic lives in a weather vane world that points always and only toward God.

TUESDAY, MARCH 4: The monastic heart is the heart that concentrates solely, consciously, completely on living this life in the womb of God, in the essence of the eternal one. When God is the “monos,” the only goal of our lives, then we are living a “monastic” life, whatever the shape—married, single, or religious—the monastery of my own particular soul-life may be.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5: When God becomes conscious to each of us, when we direct our lives to that consciousness, when that consciousness is the undercurrent of every thought and word and action of our lives, then we know that Brother Wayne is startlingly correct: then “you are a monk.”

THURSDAY, MARCH 6: Americans are very pragmatic people. If we want something, we never doubt that we can figure out how to go about getting it. It never occurs to us, however, that there are some things that are not meant to be achieved. God, in fact, is one of those things.

FRIDAY, MARCH 7: If God can be gotten, then God is not God. In this case, it is the search itself that is the finding.

SATURDAY, MARCH 8: The God-search is the pulse that drives us from one thing to another in life and gives us the wisdom to choose between them.

SUNDAY, MARCH 9: An awareness of God comes from the ever-ungratified outreach of the soul. We are not meant to be satisfied in this life, only to be aware that not everything is to be found here.

MONDAY, MARCH 10: “All I ever wanted was to sing to God,” Peter Shaffer wrote. “God gave me that longing and then made me mute.” It is the discovery that nothing here ever really squelches the thirst of the soul that, in the end, finally leads us, exhausted and grateful, to God.

*God is not
somewhere else.
God is everywhere.
God is here.
With me. In me.
Now.*

TUESDAY, MARCH 11: Just when we think we have no spiritual life at all may be exactly the moment when the seed for one has begun to take root in us.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12: We are born with God pulsing through our veins. The rest of life is simply the process of coming to realize that nothing else we make God will ever be able to be God for us.

THURSDAY, MARCH 13: The search for God comes one day to the point where we know without doubt that we are immersed in God. Bringing ourselves to finally recognize that reality is the essential task of life.

FRIDAY, MARCH 14: There is no such thing as “getting” God. The fact is that we already have God.

SATURDAY, MARCH 15: It is the awareness of that presence that life intends to teach us to cultivate. Samuel Beckett writes, “Given the existence of a personal God who loves us dearly, it is established beyond all doubt that humanity wastes and pines for reasons unknown.”

SUNDAY, MARCH 16: The God of Light is also the God of Darkness. Why would we not expect God, then, to be in the dark spots of our lives as well as in its light?

MONDAY, MARCH 17: Most of life is spent trying to make our own gods. Then, when they fail us, as all of them do, we discover underneath it all that God has been there all the time.

TUESDAY, MARCH 18: God is not dead. God is simply waiting for us in silence so that, in touch with God ourselves, we can be the voice of the love of God to others.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19: Prayer is much more than “prayers.” It is awareness, attention, and presence. “Certain thoughts are prayers,” Victor Hugo wrote. “There are moments when, whatever be the attitude of the body, the soul is on its knees.”

THURSDAY, MARCH 20: God is not an occasional find in life—in church, maybe, or at sunset. God is a sense of life now and of life beyond life. God is what carries me through life. God is what calls me to live for more than the present, to live despite the past, to live into the heart of the universe.

FRIDAY, MARCH 21: God is not somewhere else. God is everywhere. God is here. With me. In me. Now. “We have what we seek,” the monk Thomas Merton wrote. “We don’t have to rush after it. It was there all the time, and if we give it time, it will make itself known to us.”

SATURDAY, MARCH 22: Once we begin to recognize God at work in us, everything in life becomes holy, becomes life-giving.

SUNDAY, MARCH 23: The presence of God in our lives affects everything else about it; it focuses our values; it directs our desires; it shapes our relations to others; it simplifies our needs.

MONDAY, MARCH 24: The cultivation of the monastic heart is not an exercise in the cultivation of sterility of spirit. It depends instead on a commitment to the cultivation of a spirit nourished on awe and alleluia.

TUESDAY, MARCH 25: To develop a monastic spirit is to have a single-minded commitment to the one thing in life that is necessary: intimacy with the God who is closer to us than our very breath. God we breathe in; God we breathe out.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 26: To be centered in God alone does not mean to have no interests but God. It means to realize that all other interests are meant to bring us

closer to God. They are not meant to take God's place in our lives but to enable God's spirit to enhance the meaning of everything else.

THURSDAY, MARCH 27: To pray in the midst of the mundane is simply and strongly to assert that this dull and tiring day is holy and its simple labors are the stuff of God's saving presence for me now.

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FRIDAY, MARCH 28: "Two there are who please God," Nikita Ivanovich Panin writes, "those who serve God with all their heart because they know God; those who seek God with all their heart because they know God not." Point: there is no state of life in which we lack God.

SATURDAY, MARCH 29: Where the presence of God seems to be missing, God is waiting for you to take it there—to "God" it with life and love and mercy. "Why indeed must 'God' be a noun," Mary Daly writes. "Why not a verb—the most active and dynamic of all?"

SUNDAY, MARCH 30: All of life is a journey toward God. The only question is, What path are you on—and what is missing from life, as a result? Don't worry. It's there waiting for you—if you'll only keep going. "I cannot walk an inch," Anne Sexton writes, "without trying to walk to God."

MONDAY, MARCH 31: The point at which we look beyond ourselves is where we find God in the rest of the world. Then life spills over with the wonder of God. Then we find the fullness of the Spirit for which we have been searching. "God," Heraclitus writes, "is day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, surfeit and hunger."



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. Did you always understand that you were seeking God? What, if anything, did you think you were pursuing earlier in your life: success, happiness, security, an answer to restlessness or anxiety, love? Did that change along the way? In what ways?
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. On March 4, Sister Joan writes, "The monastic heart is the heart that concentrates solely, consciously, completely on living this life in the womb of God, in the essence of the eternal one. When God is the 'monos,' the only goal of our lives, then we are living a 'monastic' life, whatever the shape—married, single, or religious—the monastery of my own particular soul-life may be." What do you make of this idea? By this metric, do you consider yourself "monastic"? What might be the gifts and the drawbacks of a life singularly focused on God?

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.

- The God of Light is also the God of Darkness. Why would we not expect God, then, to be in the dark spots of our lives as well as in its light?
- If God can be gotten, then God is not God. In this case, it is the search itself that is the finding.
- God is what calls me to live for more than the present, to live despite the past, to live into the heart of the universe.

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....



KAREN BUKOWSKI

SCRIPTURE ECHO

“The Reign of heaven is like a buried treasure found in a field. The ones who discovered it hid it again, and, rejoicing at the discovery, went and sold all their possessions and bought that field. Or again, the Reign of heaven is like a merchant’s search for fine pearls. When one pearl of great value was found, the merchant went back and sold everything else and bought it.”

—MATTHEW 18:3

PRAYER

O my God,
Teach my heart this day where and how to see you,
Where and how to find you.
You have made me and remade me,
And you have bestowed on me
All the good things I possess,
And still I do not know you.
I have not yet done that
For which I was made.
Teach me to seek you,
For I cannot seek you
Unless you teach me,
Or find you
Unless you show yourself to me.
Let me seek you in my desire,
Let me desire you in my seeking.
Let me find you by loving you,
Let me love you when I find you.

- Saint Anselm

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 \$15.00 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.

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JOAN CHITTISTER is one of the most influential religious and social leaders of our time. For over 50 years she has passionately advocated on behalf of peace, human rights, women’s issues, and monastic and church renewal. A much sought-after international speaker, she is also a best-selling author of more than 60 books. Her new podcast series, “Risking the Questions,” is available wherever you listen to your podcasts.

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JOIN THE CONVERSATION

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

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