



What Is Contemplation?

Thomas Merton

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There are so many Christians who do not appreciate the magnificent dignity of their vocation to sanctity, to the knowledge, love and service of God.

There are so many Christians who do not realize what possibilities God has placed in the life of Christian perfection — what possibilities for joy in the knowledge and love of Him.

There are so many Christians who have practically no idea of the immense love of God for them, and of the power of that Love to do them good, to bring them happiness.

Why do we think of the gift of contemplation, infused contemplation, mystical prayer, as something essentially strange and esoteric reserved for a small class of almost unnatural beings and prohibited to everyone else? It is perhaps because we have forgotten that contemplation is the work of the Holy Ghost acting on our souls through His gifts of Wisdom and Understanding with special intensity to increase and perfect our love for Him. These gifts are part of the normal equipment of Christian sanctity. They are given to all in Baptism, and if they are given it is presumably because God wants them to be developed. Their development will always remain the free gift of God and it is true that His wise Providence sees fit to develop them less in some saints than in others. But it is also true that God often measures His gifts by our desire to receive them, and by our cooperation with His grace, and the Holy Spirit will not waste any of His gifts on people who have little or no interest in them.

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