

# The Spirituality of Thomas Merton in a Time of Coronavirus

Daniel P. Horan, OFM

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## Outline

### I. Introduction

#### a. Opening Reflection

"The desert is the home of despair. And despair, now, is everywhere. Let us not think that our interior solitude consists in the acceptance of defeat. We cannot escape anything by consenting tacitly to be defeated. Despair is an abyss without bottom. Do not think to close it by consenting to it and trying to forget you have consented.

This, then, is our desert: *to live facing despair, but not to consent*. To trample it down under hope in the Cross. To wage war against despair unceasingly. That war is our wilderness. If we wage courageously, we will find Christ at our side. If we cannot face it, we will never find Him" (*Thoughts in Solitude*).

#### b. Who Was Thomas Merton?

#### c. Why Should We Care?

### II. Fear and the Present Pandemic

### III. Three Themes: Silence, Solitude, Contemplation

### IV. Closing Prayer

"Oh God, we are one with You. You have made us one with You. You have taught us that if we are open to one another, You will dwell in us. Help us to preserve this openness and to fight for it with all our hearts. Help us to realize that there can be no understanding where there is mutual rejection. Oh God, in accepting one another wholeheartedly, fully, completely, we accept You, and we thank You, and we adore You, and we love You with our whole being, because our being is in Your being, our spirit is rooted in Your Spirit. Fill us then with love, and let us be bound together with love as we go our diverse ways, united in this one spirit which makes you present in the world, and which makes You witness to the ultimate reality that is love. Love has overcome. Love is victorious. Amen" (*The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*)

### V. Discussion and Q/A

## Some Key Merton Texts for Further Reading

- Thomas Merton, *Life and Holiness* (New York: Doubleday, 1963).
- Thomas Merton, *Love and Living*, eds. Naomi Burton Stone and Patrick Hart (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1979)
- Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1960).
- Thomas Merton, *No Man is an Island* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955).
- Thomas Merton, *The Inner Experience: Notes on Contemplation*, ed. William H. Shannon (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2003)
- Thomas Merton, *Thoughts In Solitude* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1956)

## Additional Helpful Resources

- International Thomas Merton Society: [www.Merton.org/ITMS](http://www.Merton.org/ITMS)
- Christine Bochen, ed., *Thomas Merton: Essential Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000).
- Daniel P. Horan, *The Franciscan Heart of Thomas Merton: A New Look at the Spiritual Inspiration of His Life, Thought, and Writing* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2014).
- Daniel P. Horan, *Thomas Merton for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: New Insights on Important Themes*, 12 twenty-five-minute lectures on CD or MP3 *Know You Know Media* (2017)