

## Monday

### Fear of Genuine Freedom

If individualism and subjectivism are so widely suspect among us, there is perhaps a very good reason for it. We live in a climate of individualism. But our individualism is in decay. Our tradition of freedom which, as a matter of fact, is rooted in a deeply Christian soil, and which in itself is worthy of the highest respect and loyalty, has begun to lose its genuine vitality. It is becoming more and more a verbal convention rather than a spiritual conviction. The tendency to substitute words about freedom for the reality of freedom itself has brought us to a state of ambivalent spiritual servitude. The noise with which we protest our love of freedom tends to be proportionate to our actual fear of genuine freedom, and our guilt at our unconscious refusal to pay the price of freedom.

—Thomas Merton, *Seasons of Celebration*

### Scripture

*Then he looked up at his disciples and said:*

*‘Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.*

*‘Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.*

*‘Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.*

*‘Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.*

*‘But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.*

*‘Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.*

*‘Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.*

*‘Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets. (Luke 6.20-26)*

### Prayer

You enjoin me to give up everything to follow you. You teach me that the price of genuine freedom is to become poor and hungry for the kingdom of heaven. Freedom for your disciples is freedom to do justice and liberate our neighbors, as we liberate ourselves, from whatever keeps us fettered in ignorance of your command to love our neighbors as ourselves.

## **Tuesday**

The illusory character of the freedom which we have tried to find in moral and psychological irresponsibility has become inescapable. Our abdication of responsibility is at the same time an abdication of liberty. The resolution to let “someone else,” the anonymous forces of society, assume responsibility for everything means that we abdicate from public responsibility, from mature concern and even from spiritual life. We retire from the public realm of freedom into the private world of necessity, imagining that the escape from responsibility is an escape into freedom. On the contrary, it is...an “escape from freedom.” But when we turn over the running of our lives to anonymous forces, to “them” (whoever “they” may be, and nobody quite knows), what actually happens is that we fall under the tyranny of collective fantasies and delusions.

—Thomas Merton, *Seasons of Celebration*

## **Scripture**

*Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;  
remove the evil of your doings  
from before my eyes;  
cease to do evil,  
learn to do good;  
seek justice,  
rescue the oppressed,  
defend the orphan,  
plead for the widow. (Isaiah 1.16-17)*

## **Prayer**

Save me, O God, from being a full participant in a society grown fat and rich on the backs of others. Take off my blinders so I may see the injustice and poverty everywhere around me. Help me to understand the need for a repentance that turns my heart to a loving and just relationship with everyone.

## **Wednesday**

### **The Illusion of Individuality**

We are beginning to understand that we live in a climate of all-embracing conformities. We have become mass-produced automatons. Our lives, our homes, our cities, our thoughts, or perhaps our lack of thoughts have all taken on an impersonal mask of resigned and monotonous sameness. We who once made such a cult of originality, experiment, personal commitment and individual creativity, now find ourselves among the least individual, the least original and the least personal of all the people on the face of the earth.... In this desperate situation, the ideal of individuality has not been laid aside. Rather it has taken on the features of an obsessive cult. People “express themselves” in ways that grow more and more frantic in proportion as they realize that the individuality and the distinctive difference they are attempting to express no longer exists....The more we try to express our difference by “originality,” the more we show that we are the same.

—Thomas Merton, *Seasons of Celebration*

### **Scripture**

*So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him. Then the word of the Lord came to me: Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the Lord. Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it. Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the Lord: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings. (Jeremiah 18.3-11)*

### **Prayer**

I listen to the words of your prophets as they express in human terms the alienation we experience when we ignore your counsel and become self-centered, both as individuals and collectively. Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

## Thursday

### Christian Personalism

What is the real root of personality in a [person]? It is obviously that which is irreplaceable, genuinely unique, on the deepest spiritual level. Personalism is the discovery, the respect, but not the cult, for this deep reality. Secular personalism is a...craze for individuality, a rage for self-manifestation in which the highest value is sought in the recognition by others of one's own uniqueness. But the great paradox of Christian personalism is this: it consists in something more than bringing to light the unique and irreplaceable element in the individual Christian. On the contrary, Christian personalism does not require that the inmost secret of our being become manifest or public to all. We do not even have to see it clearly ourselves! We are more truly "Christian persons" when our inmost secret remains a mystery shared by ourselves and God, and communicated to others.

—Thomas Merton, *Seasons of Celebration*

### Scripture

*Blessed are those who trust in the Lord,  
whose trust is the Lord.  
They shall be like a tree planted by water,  
sending out its roots by the stream.  
It shall not fear when heat comes,  
and its leaves shall stay green;  
in the year of drought it is not anxious,  
and it does not cease to bear fruit.*

*The heart is devious above all else;  
it is perverse—  
who can understand it?  
I the Lord test the mind  
and search the heart,  
to give to all according to their ways,  
according to the fruit of their doings. (Jeremiah 17.7-10)*

### Prayer

Let me feel shame, Lord, for my sins, particularly ones based on injustice and unconcern. Let me know my heart as it is in your sight and in my neighbors' sight. Straighten the torturous paths of my heart.

## **Friday**

### **Discovering Our Inmost Self**

Christian personalism does not root out the inner secret of the individual in order to put it on display in a spiritual beauty-contest. On the contrary, our growing awareness of our own personality enables us at the same time to divine and to respect the inner secret of our neighbor, our brothers and sisters in Christ. Christian personalism is, then, the sacramental sharing of the inner secret of personality in the mystery of love. This sharing demands full respect for the mystery of the person, whether it be our own person, or the person of our neighbor, or the infinite secret of God. In fact, Christian personalism is the discovery of one's own inmost self, and of the inmost self of one's neighbor, in the mystery of Christ: a discovery that respects the hiddenness and incommunicability of each one's personal secret, while paying tribute to his presence in the common celebration.

—Thomas Merton, *Seasons of Celebration*

### **Scripture**

*'Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.*

*'So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

*'And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6.1-6)*

### **Prayer**

Help me to see the mystery and beauty in every person and to respond with love and joy to your presence within them.

## **Saturday**

### **Finding Ourselves in Worship**

Now it is precisely in the liturgy, the public prayer of the Christian Assembly, that the Christian discovers the secret of [their] own inviolable solitude, and learns to respect the solitude of [their] brother and sister while at the same time sharing it. This is not possible without the public celebration of the mysteries: public of course to the faithful assembly, though not to the uninitiated. Christian persons find themselves and their brothers and sisters in the communal celebration of the mystery of Christ. But what is manifested, proclaimed, celebrated and consummated in the liturgy is not my personality or your personality: it is the personality of Christ the Lord, who, when two or three of us are gathered together in His Name, is present in the midst of us. This presence of Christ in the liturgical celebration leads to our discovery and declaration of our own secret and spiritual self.

—Thomas Merton, *Seasons of Celebration*

### **Scripture**

*Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity  
and passing over the transgression  
of the remnant of your possession?  
He does not retain his anger for ever,  
because he delights in showing clemency.  
He will again have compassion upon us;  
he will tread our iniquities under foot.  
You will cast all our sins  
into the depths of the sea.  
You will show faithfulness to Jacob  
and unswerving loyalty to Abraham,  
as you have sworn to our ancestors  
from the days of old. (Micah 7.18-20)*

### **Prayer**

I do not know myself outside of those who gather in your name to praise your sacred deed for our salvation proclaimed in the gospel and celebrated in the Eucharist. Give me the grace to cling to the assembly gathered by you. There is no salvation for me outside the presence of my brothers and sisters who together hear and do your word.