



session one

LIVING JOYFULLY IN THE PRESENT MOMENT

OPENING REFLECTION

PSALM 33:20–22

Our soul is waiting for the Lord.
The Lord is our help and our shield.
In him do our hearts find joy.
We trust in his holy name.

May your love be upon us, O Lord,
As we place all our hope in you.

INTRODUCTION TO THE TEXTS

In response to a drawing of a house sent to him by five-year-old Grace Sisson, Merton wrote a poem for her called “Grace’s House.” In the poem he noted that she had forgotten to draw a road to it: “Alas, there is no road to Grace’s house!” When she was ten, Grace sent another drawing to Merton with a road to her house that she named “The Road to Joy.” Merton thanked her for the new drawing and its road in a letter: “I am glad you still draw things with love, and I hope you will never lose that. But I hope you and I will secretly travel our own road to joy, which is mysteriously revealed to us without our exactly realizing it. When I say that, I don’t want you to start thinking about it. You already know it without thinking about it” (*The Road to Joy*, pp. 352–353). No matter how rough the roads of his

monastic journey to find his identity in God, Merton knew joy whenever he realized God's mercy toward him. He rejoiced in his baptism, in his monastic vocation to the priesthood, and in his gifts as a writer, which allowed him to share his life's blessings with others.

Joy in its many facets is the gem we examine in these sessions of contemplative dialogue. Joy is not a reward for our practice but is always a gift of the Holy Spirit mediated through the persons and events of our daily lives. Joy is not a state but the appearance and presence of a divine person whose face we love and recognize in all the faces that we meet. Contemplative living is a way to respond through all occasions with gratitude for having been born to realize our identities in God as we travel together the wide and gracious "road to Joy."

MERTON'S VOICE

FROM *A SEARCH FOR SOLITUDE*

The grip the present has on me. That is the one thing that has grown most noticeably in my spiritual life—nothing much else has. The rest dims, as it should. I am getting older. The reality of *now*—the unreality of all the rest. The unreality of ideas and explanations and formulas. I am. The unreality of all the rest. The pigs shriek. Butterflies dance together—or danced together a moment ago—against the blue sky at the end of the woodshed. The buzz saw stands outside there, half covered with dirty and tattered canvas. The trees are fresh and green in the sun (more rain yesterday). Small clouds inexpressibly beautiful and silent and eloquent over the silent woodlands. What a celebration of light,

quietness, and glory! This is my feast, sitting here in the straw. . . .

This time is given to me by God that I may live in it. It is not given to make something *out of it* but given me to be stored away in eternity as my own.

For this afternoon to be my own in eternity, it must be my own this afternoon, and I must possess myself in it, not be possessed by books, by ideas not my own, by a compulsion to produce what nobody needs. But simply to glorify God by accepting His gift and His work. To work for Him is to work that I myself may live. (pp. 214–215, 219)

ANOTHER VOICE

JEAN-PIERRE DE CAUSSADE, *ABANDONMENT TO DIVINE PROVIDENCE*

Today God still speaks to us as he used to speak to our ancestors at a time when there were neither spiritual directors nor any systems of spirituality. To be faithful to the designs of God then comprised the whole of one's spiritual life. Religious devotion had not become a science crammed with precepts and detailed instructions. Nowadays, no doubt our special needs make this necessary, but in the old days people were less complex and more straightforward. Then they knew only that each moment brought a duty that must be faithfully fulfilled. Those spiritually inclined needed nothing more. They were like the hand of a clock which, minute by minute, crosses its appointed space, for ceaselessly prompted by divine grace, they attended without thinking to each new task offered them by God at every hour of the day. . . .

This treasure is everywhere. It is offered to us all the time and wherever we are. All creatures, friends or foes, pour it out in abundance, and it flows through every fiber of our body and soul until it reaches the very core of our being. If we open our mouths they will be filled. God's activity runs through the universe. It wells up and around and penetrates every created being.

This is the true spirituality, which is valid for all times and for everybody. We cannot become truly good in a better, more marvelous, and yet easier way than by the simple use of the means offered us by God, the unique director of souls. It is the ready acceptance of all that comes to us at each moment of our lives. (pp. 22, 25–26)

REFLECT AND DIALOGUE

What images, words, or sentences in the readings most resonate with your life's experiences? In what ways do they connect with your life?

Who in your life is a source of your joy?

Through what periods of your life have you found yourself most joyful? What made this so?

What is your relationship to time? Are you struggling against it, wasting it, spending it, or enjoying it?

CLOSING

Conclude with one of the meditations on pages 53–55 or with a period of quiet reflection.