

## Merton in Miniature

Review of  
*Exploring Prayer with Thomas Merton*  
 Selected and Edited by Tony Castle  
 London: St. Paul's Publishing, 2009  
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Reviewed by **Jeanne Doriot, SP**

Photographed by John Howard Griffin, Thomas Merton sits at his desk gazing out his hermitage window toward the trees and path leading to the Abbey. This picture of Merton invites the reader to prayerful pondering, exactly the theme of Tony Castle's *Exploring Prayer with Thomas Merton*, which features excerpts from Merton's writings.

How have I previously missed such a gem? According to Castle in his introduction, "Prayer is to the Christian what water is to the goldfish or air to the eagle" (7). Merton himself gives us the solution to any possible conflict between work and prayer in a selection from *New Seeds of Contemplation* that "To do the work carefully and well, with love and respect for the nature of the task and with due attention, is to unite myself to God's will in my work. . . . When I act as his instrument my work cannot become an obstacle to prayer" (25).

Merton can speak of prayer from personal familiarity with formal prayer, e.g., the Mass and monastic prayer, particularly the psalms. His mention of praying with psalms is a fundamental motif throughout his writings, wherein he encourages this as a basic of one's prayer life. "We need only to take advantage of the texts [experts] have given us, and use them with faith, and confidence and love," he assures the reader in *Praying the Psalms*, quoted in this little manual (45).

Castle's compact 48-page booklet features a fine collection of such pertinent excerpts from select volumes by the beloved monk of Gethsemani who lived what he wrote, indeed growing closer to Christ in all he did and encouraging his readers to do likewise, assuring us what a simple thing it is, after all is said and done, written and read, to pray. "Prayer," Merton wrote, "means yearning for the simple presence of God, for a personal understanding of his word, for knowledge of his will and for a capacity to hear and obey him" (19 [The *Climate of Monastic Prayer*]).

Hopefully, these encouraging quotations will entice readers to visit or revisit the books quoted or to add this publication to their collection of books featuring Merton in miniature.

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