



Advent Daily Reflections

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Today's reading is from Thomas Merton:

The secret of my identity is hidden in the love and mercy of God. But whatever is in God is really identical with [God], for [God's] infinite simplicity admits no division and no distinction. Therefore I cannot hope to find myself anywhere except in God. Ultimately, the only way I can be myself is to become identified with God in Whom is hidden the reason and the fulfillment of my existence. Therefore there is only one problem on which all my existence, my peace and my happiness depend: to discover myself in discovering God. If I find [God], I will find myself and if I find my true self, I will find [God].

Today's Reflection is by Emily Hursh:

The year before the pandemic, we read the book *No Other Gods: The Politics of the Ten Commandments* by Ana Levy-Lyons as a parish. The concept from that book that stuck out to me the most was from the Jewish tradition: When you die and meet God, They will not ask you why you weren't more like the holy men and women of history. They will ask why you weren't more like yourself. It struck me as almost heretical at the time: I think of myself as quite flawed, and particularly self-centered, and plenty of people and institutions would say the same or worse about me as a queer person (the Catholic church's dismissal of the way I love as "deeply disordered" will perhaps never stop reverberating through my mind). But this reading made me remember that passage because they seem to be getting at the same truth: if you diligently seek to know and be who God made you to be, you will inevitably grow closer to God.

It's a comforting idea, but it seems to sit in contrast with concepts of original sin, and the fallen nature of our world, and even my own experience: Sometimes it seems like who I truly am is someone who wants to hide under the covers and not even take decent care of myself or my home, let alone be of service to others in the world. But is that truly who I am? Or is that who struggling to survive in a fallen world that defines my worth by my economic output, and ability to follow gendered cultural scripts has made me: a person in need of deep rest and refuge? What's so bad about resting, anyway? That's a commandment, too.

This reading suggests that the way to discern who God made me to be is to identify more and more with God. It's a little bit of a scary path to take when the understanding of God I grew up with led me to loathe myself more and more the more I identified with him. Perhaps it is our fallen world that has left so many people thinking they're growing closer to God by hating and trying to change themselves. As though he understands my fears, Thomas Merton invites us to solve the equation from the other end: seeking to know myself better isn't navel-gazey, or pointless. Rather, it will inevitably lead me closer to God by leading me into an ever deepening understanding of and love for myself, this unique creature God made, smiled, and called Good.



Emily Hursh has been an active member of Holy Apostles Brooklyn since she first came through the doors of the church in 2017. She serves on the vestry, is a member of the choir, has taught Sunday school, led small groups and the LGBTQ+ group. By day, Emily is a birth doula and an acrobatic aerialist. She loves to cook, foster kittens and play competitive pool in her spare time.