



Advent Daily Reflections
December 10, 2024

Listen to the Advent Podcast [here](#), and through [Spotify](#) or [Apple](#).

Today's reading is from Thomas Merton:

It is not complicated to lead the spiritual life. But it is difficult. We are blind, and subject to a thousand illusions. We must expect to be making mistakes almost all the time. We must be content to fall repeatedly and to begin again to try to deny ourselves, for the love of God.

It is when we are angry at our own mistakes that we tend most of all to deny ourselves for love of ourselves. We want to shake off the hateful things that have humbled us. In our rush to escape the humiliation of our own mistakes, we run head first into the opposite error, seeking comfort and compensation. And so we spend our lives running back and forth from one attachment to another.

If that is all our self-denial amounts to, our mistakes will never help us.

The thing to do when we have made a mistake is not to give up doing what you were doing and start something altogether now, but to start over again with the thing you began badly and try, for the love of God, to do it well.

A tree gives glory to God by being a tree. For in being what God means it to be it is obeying [God]. It "consents," so to speak, to [God's] creative love. It is expressing an idea which is in God and which is not distinct from the essence of God, and therefore a tree imitates God by being a tree

Today's Reflection is by Alice Avouris:

We're not all meant to live the contemplative life. I am not a calm person. I have not ever meditated successfully, I don't think, although audible 'om's' help in a yoga class. And during prayer, it's better for me to have it written out, to help me focus. So, Thomas Merton's words on how difficult it can be to participate in the spiritual life of a monastery or convent, ring true for me. And I would never try.

Thomas Merton's two readings are so different; they could have been written by two separate people. If the first describes me or you, during the busy Christmas season, a time also of self-denial, perhaps shorter tempers and loss of focus on the real beauty behind it all, the second passage is truly mystical, the very description of a place of peace.

So here we are in Advent 2024, trying to catch up with ourselves, rushing from one thing to another. It's harder to be 'present' in worship and in interactions with our family and friends. For me, it's a season of back-and-forth, between anticipatory joy and frustration. "Will I ever get it all done?" and so on. Peace? Not so much. Focusing on our giving of time, talent and wealth, the gift to us of God's grace we may forget to unwrap.

Finally, the second passage from Thomas Merton: “A tree gives glory to God by being a tree.” This is such a healing image. The tree gives without fuss or self-consciousness. It is simply beautiful, a necessity to life, but has no pride. We imagine this tree to have the barest consciousness, no knowledge of self, except as a part of nature, a part of us, and God.

Elm, oak, or star-topped evergreen, I want to keep this image in my mind for the rest of the year and into the next.



Alice Avouris has been coming to Holy Apostles since January, 2018, after a fun time singing with the carolers. She lives with her husband Phaedon a few steps away, and loves being involved with music by singing in the choir, playing recorder and flute, and sometimes the organ!