A Christmas Quiet Worship

Saturday, 19 December 2020, at 9:00 a.m.

[available at: www.westminstermpls.org/worship/additional-worship-opportunities/]

Until we can again gather in-person, each of us is invited to “gather” in our own special place, at 9:00 a.m. on each Third Saturday . . . to read or pray the bold-face words quietly, out-loud . . . knowing that they are being read or prayed by others at the same time . . . by a cloud of witnesses. You may wish to have a candle at hand to light as the Christ Candle.

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As we gather on this winter morning, six days before Christmas morning, we give special thanks for the life and ministry of Thomas Merton who died accidentally in Bangkok fifty-two years ago on 10 December 1968 having also entered the Abbey of Gethsemani as a novice monk on 10 December 1941.

Here is Merton’s “Blessing for a Winter Morning,” from his *Dancing in the Water of Life*:

"The blessing of Prime under the tall pines, in the cold of early morning, behind the hermitage.
The blessing of sawing wood, cleaning house, washing dishes.
The blessing of a quiet, alert, concentrated, fully ‘present’ meditation.
The blessing of God's presence and guidance."

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Our worship begins with three Christmas Chants that Merton might well have sung during his years as a monk, chants sung here by the current monks at Gethsemani.

**Gathering Music:**

Three Chants from “A Child is Born” sung by the current monks at Gethsemani

Christus Natus Est" [“Christ is Born”]  
"Ecce Angus Dei" [“Behold the Lamb of God”]  
"Hymn of Lauds" [Hymn of Praise]

A brief period of silence and calm
A Celtic Morning Prayer and Opening Words: from Alexander Carmichael’s *Carmina Gadelica* as the Christ Candle is lighted

“Come I this day to the Father, 
Come I this day to the Son, 
Come I to the Holy Spirit powerful; 
Come I this day to God, 
Come I this day to Christ, 
Come I with the Spirit of kindly balm.

“God, and Spirit, and Jesus, 
From the crown of my head 
    to the soles of my feet; 
Come I with my reputation, 
Come I with my testimony, 
Come I to Thee, Jesus; 
    Jesu, shelter me. 

A brief period of calm and silence

A Sung Prayer from Taizé: "Bless the Lord"
Read slowly, or hum or sing if you know the tune

"Bless the Lord, my soul, and Bless God’s holy name 
Bless the Lord, my soul, who leads me into life.”

A brief period of silence

Psalm of the Day: from the *Lectionary*, the Laudate Psalm for Christmas Day, from *Psalm 148*

"Praise the Lord! 
Praise the Lord from the heavens; 
    praise him in the heights! . . . 
Praise him, all his angels; 
    praise him, all his host! . . . 
Praise the Lord from the earth, . . . 
Mountains and all hills, 
    fruit trees and all cedars! . . . 
Wild animals and all cattle, 
    creeping things and flying birds! . . ."
Kings of the earth and all peoples, 
princes and all rulers of the earth! . . .
Young men and women alike, 
old and young together! . . .
Let them all praise the name of the Lord, 
for his name alone is exalted; 
his glory is above earth and heaven. . . . " NRSV

A brief period of silence, for reflection on the Psalm

A Sung Prayer from Taizé:  "Praise the Lord, All You Peoples"
Read slowly, or hum or sing if you know the tune

"Laudate omnes gentes, laudate, Dominum."  "Praise the Lord, all you peoples"

A brief period of silence


The apostle John writes,
"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; . . . everyone who loves is born of God and knows God, . . . whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent God’s only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us and sent God’s Son . . .

Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us, and God’s love is perfected in us. . . .

So, we have known—and believe—the love that God has for us." NRSV

The Word of the Lord . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . “Thanks be to God.”

A brief period of calm and silence
A Sung Prayer from Taizé:
"Where there is love"
Read slowly, or hum or sing if you know the tune

"Ubi caritas et amor, ubi caritas, Deus ibi est." "Where there is charity and love, where there is love, God is always there."

Great Silence
The sound of the gong signals the beginning (once) and the ending (three times) of a time for listening with the ears of our hearts, for (in words from Thomas Merton) “the blessing of a quiet, alert, concentrated, fully present meditation.” (c. 10 min.)

Prayers of the People from Celtic Treasure, by John Philip Newell, and the Book of Common Worship

“In the silence of our hearts or in spoken words . . .
we give thanks for the gift of this day
and pray for the life of the world. . . .
Especially this morning we thank you
for the warmth of sunlight . . .
the wetness and freshness of new snow . . .
and for all that nourishes the earth. . . .
We thank you for the presence and power of your Spirit . . .
for the support and encouragement we receive from others . . .
and for the "telling presence" that this congregation seeks to be . . .
Lord in your mercy . . . “Hear our prayer”

Merciful God, strengthen us in prayer that we may lift up the brokenness of this world for your healing, . . . and share in the saving love of Jesus Christ. . . .
Especially, this Advent morning, we pray
for the lonely and the forgotten . . .
for children without families or homes . . .
for all under economic stress in these special times . . .
for agents of caring and relief . . .
and for the Church throughout the world . . .
Lord in your mercy . . . “Hear our prayer”

Lord, listen as we now offer our individual prayers, in silence or in words
Each prayer ends with, “Lord in your mercy . . . . . . . . . . . Hear our prayer.”

We know that you hear our prayers, Lord. Listen also now as we offer the prayer taught to us by your Son, Jesus:
“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. 
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. 
give us this day our daily bread; 
and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; 
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. 
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.”

A brief silence, as we prepare to end our worship in quietness and peace

Closing Words

from the Book of Common Worship, 
as the Christ Candle is extinguished

“Eternal God, . . .
You never fail to give us each day . . .
all that we ever need, and even more. . . .
Give us such joy in living
and such peace in Serving Christ, . . .
that we may gratefully make use of all your blessings, . . .
and joyfully seek our risen Lord
in everyone we meet. . . .

In Jesus Christ we pray. . . . Amen

Leave when you are ready.

As we leave this morning, let us go forth knowing deeply
"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son . . . " John 3:16

We might also wish to carry with us the words Thomas Merton wrote
as he rejoiced in the thin places he’d experienced,
there in his Hermitage,
in the quiet woods at Gethsemane:

“When psalms surprise me with their music,
and antiphons turn to rum,
the Spirit sings;
the bottom drops out of my soul.

And from the center of my cellar,
love,
louder than thunder,
opens a heaven of naked air. . . .”

“Psalm,” from The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton