

## Bridges to Contemplative Living with Thomas Merton

Ash Wednesday

A Change of Heart (metanoia)

**Psalm 50**     (*The Psalms, A New Translation, arranged by Joseph Gelineau*)

Indeed, you love truth in the heart;  
then in the secret of my heart teach me wisdom.  
O purify me, then I shall be clean;  
O wash me, I shall be whiter than snow.

O rescue me, God, my helper,  
And my tongue shall ring out your goodness.  
And my mouth shall declare your praise.  
O Lord, open my lips

### **Merton's Voice from *Seasons of Celebration***

But where shall the sinner turn for pardon? To God, obviously. And the first thing is of course to seek Him in the depths of our heart, asking pardon for our sins. But the Christian conscience, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, tells us that this inner movement of repentance in the privacy of the heart, though it is essential, is not enough by itself. For sin is not a purely individual affair, and neither is pardon. However private it may be, sin remains in some sense everybody's business because everyone is affected by the evil that is in the heart of one. It is not possible for us to live so separated from others, so isolated and private in our own hearts, that our secret selfishness and sin will not affect others. We are involved in each other's lives, not by choice but by necessity, for that is the way we are made. No one can pretend successively to live purely in his or her own private universe and remain sane. The very condition of normal human life is community, communication, and 'conversation' in the Latin sense of *conversatio* – exchange on the level of social living. The lives of all of us are inextricably mixed together, and the salvation and damnation of souls is involved in this inescapable communication of freedoms. Either we love and help one another or we will hate and attack one another in which latter case we will all be one another's hell. ...

The heart of the Christian message is precisely reconciliation in the Spirit of Love so that communion in freedom turns into communion in beatitude. In which case heaven is communion with 'others' (pp. 222-223).

### **Reflect and Dialogue**

What words or sentences in these readings most resonate with your life's experiences?

How has your personal understanding of Lent, sin, and conversion changed as you have matured in your spiritual life?

What hoped-for change in mind and heart (metanoia) do you pray for this Lent?

In what ways have you, by grace and your inner work, grown beyond your former way of life?