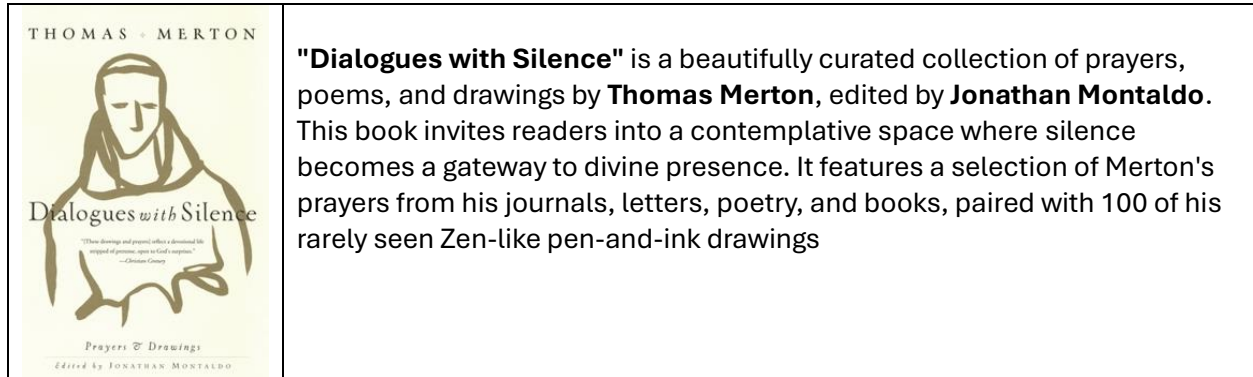


## Thomas Merton's Prayers as Mystical Poetry



**Mystical poetry** is a genre that **seeks to explore and express the divine, the transcendent, and the innermost spiritual experiences**. It often delves into themes of unity with the cosmos, the ineffable nature of the divine, and the quest for spiritual enlightenment or union with a higher power.

**Characteristics of mystical poetry include:**

- **Symbolism:** Using symbols and allegory to represent spiritual truths.
- **Emotional Depth:** Conveying profound emotions, such as longing, ecstasy, and reverence.
- **Transcendence:** Focusing on experiences beyond the material world.
- **Unity:** Emphasizing the interconnectedness of all things and the unity of the soul with the divine.

## Merton's Spiritual Journey

1. Descent to Hell and glimpsing Purgatory (1915 – 1938) – 23 years
2. Purgatory into Heaven (1938 – 1949) – 11 years
3. **From Darkness to Light (1949 – 1958) – 9 years**
4. Reengaging the World (1958 – 1968) – 10 years

# Prayers

My God, I pray better to You by breathing.  
I pray better to You by walking than by talking.

**-- Entering the Silence pg. 161 (Jan 26, 1948)**

What I wear is pants. What I do is live. How I pray is breathe.

**-- Day of a Stranger (May 1965)**

O God, teach me to be satisfied with my own helplessness in the spiritual life. Teach me to be content with Your grace that comes to me in darkness and that works things I cannot see. Teach me to be happy to depend on You. To depend on You should be enough for an eternity of joy. To depend on You by itself ought to be infinitely greater than any joy which my own intellectual appetite could desire

**-- Entering the Silence pg. 202 (May 2, 1948)**

Minds which are separated pretend to blend in one another's language. The marriage of souls in concepts is mostly an illusion. Thoughts which travel outward bring back reports from You from outward things, but a dialogue with You, uttered through the world, always ends by being a dialogue with my own reflection in the stream of time.

With You there is no dialogue, unless You choose a mountain, circle it with cloud and print Your words in fire upon the mind of Moses.

What was delivered to Moses on tablets of stone, as the fruit of lightning and thunder, is **now** more thoroughly born in our souls as quietly as the breath of our own being.

**-- Entering the Silence pp. 487-488 (July 5, 1952)**

You Who sleep in my breast are not met with words, but in the emergence of life within life and wisdom within wisdom.

With You there is no longer any dialogue, any contest, any opposition. You are found in communion!

Thou in me and I in Thee, Thou in them and they in me: dispossession within dispossession, dispassion within dispassion, emptiness within emptiness, freedom within freedom.

I am alone. Thou are alone. The Father and I are One.

**-- Entering the Silence pg. 488 (July 5, 1952)**

What can I say about the emptiness and freedom into whose door I entered for that half-minute,  
which was enough for a lifetime, because it was a new life altogether?

There is nothing with which to compare it.

I could call it nothingness, but it is an infinitely fruitful freedom, to lack all things and to lack my self  
in the fresh air of that happiness that seems to be above all modes of being.

Don't let me build any more walls around it, or I will shut myself out.

**-- Entering the Silence pg. 127 (October 25, 1947)**

My Lord, You have heard the cry of my heart because it was You Who cried within my heart.  
Forgive me for having tried to evoke Your presence in my own silence. It is You Who must create me  
within Your own silence! Only this newness can save me from idolatry!

You are not found in the Temple merely by the expulsion of the moneychangers.  
You are found on the mountain every time there is a cloud. The earth swallowed those who offered  
incense without having been found, without having been called, and without having been known by  
You.

**-- No Man is an Island pg. 232 (1955)**

All day I have waited for You with my faculties still bleeding the poison of their suppressed activity. I  
have waited for Your silence and Your peace to staunch and cleanse them, O my Lord.

You will heal me when You will, because I have trusted in You.

I will not wound myself anymore with details with which I have surrounded myself like thorns - a  
penance that You do not desire of me.

You have made my soul for Your peace and Your silence, and my soul is wounded with confusion,  
with the noise of my sins and desires.

**-- Entering the Silence pg. 70 (May 4, 1947)**

A Prayer to Mary Luke Tobin

Pray for me to be a real good hermit and listen to the word of God and respond like a man. That is  
what it really involves: simply to stand on one's feet before one's Father and reply to Him in the  
Spirit.

This business about replying to the Father in the Spirit may sound like big talk but I don't mean it  
that way. "In the Spirit," in any contest I know of, means flat on your face.

How one can stand on one's own feet and be flat on one's face at the same time is a mystery. I will  
have to try to work out by living it.

**-- The School of Charity pp 288-289 (collection of letters on Religious Renewal and Spiritual  
Direction)**

Teach me to go to this country beyond words and beyond names.  
Teach me to pray on this side of the frontier, here where these woods are.

I need to be led by you. I need my heart to be moved by you. I need my soul to be made clean by your prayer. I need my will to be made strong by you. I need you for all those who suffer, who are in prison, in danger, in sorrow. I need you for all the crazy people. I need your healing hand to work always in my life. I need you to make me, as you made your Son, a healer, a comforter, a savior. I need you to help the dying cross their particular rivers. I need you for myself whether I live or die. I need to be your monk and your son. It is necessary. Amen

**-- A Search for Solitude pp. 46-47 (July 17, 1956)**

There is no leaf that is not in Your care. There is no cry that was not heard by You before it was uttered. There is no water in the shales that was not hidden there by Your wisdom. There is no concealed spring that was not concealed by You. There is no glen for a one house that was not planned by You for a lone house. There is no man for that acre of woods that was not made by You for the acre of woods.

But there is greater comfort in the substance of silence than in the answer to a question. Eternity is in the present. Eternity is in the palm of the hand. Eternity is a seed of fire whose sudden roots break barriers that keep my heart from being an abyss.

**-- Entering the Silence pg. 487 (July 5, 1952)**

*My God, I cry out by day but You do not hear me; at night, but You give me no relief! Do You remember the place by the stream? Do You remember the top of the Vineyard Knob that time in autumn when the train was in the valley? Do You remember McGinty's hollow? Do You remember the thinly wooded hillside behind Hanekamp's place? Do you remember the time of the forest fire? Do You know what has become of the little poplars we planted in the spring? Do You observe the valley where I marked the trees?*

**-- Entering the Silence pg. 487 (July 5, 1952)**