

New Seeds of Contemplation

By Thomas Merton

5 Physical solitude, exterior silence and real recollection are all morally necessary for anyone who wants to lead a contemplative life, but like everything else in creation they are nothing more than a means to an end, and if we do not understand the end we will make a wrong use of the means.

10 We do not go into the desert to escape people, but to learn how to find them; we do not leave them in order to have nothing more to do with them, but to find out the way to do them the most good. But this is only a secondary end.

The one end that includes all other is the love of God.

15 How can people act and speak as if solitude were a matter of no importance in the interior of life? Only those who have never experienced real solitude can glibly declare that it “makes no difference” and that only solitude of the heart really matters! One solitude must lead to the other!

However, the truest solitude is not something outside you, not an absence of men or of sound around you; it is an abyss opening up in the center of your own soul.

20 ...It is in this loneliness that the deepest activities begin.