

On the corner of



By Father M. Basil Pennington
NC News Service

Trappist Father Thomas Merton's spiritual journey was in some way the journey of every man and woman. He shared it with millions through his books and articles.

Father Merton always had deep sensitivity for his fellows. As a young man it led him to espouse many causes. He was even a card-carrying Communist for a short time.

Finally he found something big enough for him: Catholicism. With his usual vigor he decided the way to pursue his quest for God was to join a monastery.

In his first days within the monastery, Father Merton, whose religious name was Louis, left the world behind in every way he could. It was after some years of prayer and reflection that this changed.

One day he had to accompany a visitor into Louisville, Ky., a rare thing for a Trappist monk. As he stood on the corner of Fourth and Walnut awaiting his guest, he suddenly became aware of the great beauty of every person passing around him — a beauty most didn't seem to appreciate, least of all the persons themselves.

Father Merton saw that God loved each one and was present in each. From that moment his quest for God and deep concern for humans became one. He tried to share every person's burden and cry of hope.

Each of us hears the cry of the poor, who look to us for bread and clothes. But the poor look to us for something more — the reverence due a person made in God's image and loved by the Father.

But will we see others this way, even when we are harried by the events of life? To do so we need to spend sufficient time looking at the face of God in prayer.

Then we will see God's face in others and recognize the beauty that they themselves often

do not see. And we will be able to reflect this beauty back to them, enabling them to find their true dignity.

This experience of prayer enables us to know we have all the divine creative energy at our disposal. So we will not be overwhelmed by the magnitude of the tasks encountered.

This perspective develops through the Holy Spirit. We can begin to give him the space to teach us by allowing time each day for a listening prayer.

—Find a quiet moment in a place a bit apart.

—Close your eyes and turn to God within.

—Gently repeat his name as you listen.

Rather soon you will see some result: greater peace, greater reliance on God, a clearer sense of God's presence in you and in everyone.

This prayer offers the perspective needed for serving God in others. Sometimes we need more of this space as we sense we are losing our perspective or becoming overwhelmed by what needs to be done in the world.

Other times we will find unbounded energy and a clear perception of God in all people as we expend long hours in service of others.

A friend or a spiritual guide who shares our vision can help us develop this perspective. A guide can help us see what truly is happening in our lives and whether we are giving ourselves sufficient space to listen to God.

Father Merton once explained that he saw no conflict between the active and contemplative life "if both are raised to the level of love."

Of Father Merton, Loretto Sister Mary Luke Tobin recently commented: "He

saw contemplation not as some abstract, otherworldly act but as reality, the way a person lives."

(Father Pennington is an author and Trappist monk in Spencer, Mass.)

Praying in

By Katharine Bird
NC News Service

For a single parent, advice on handling a particularly troublesome situation came from a totally unexpected source — her child. "I couldn't believe it," she said later. "It must be God spoke through him."

For the gray-haired woman who runs a homeless shelter, the face of God shines through the careworn, sometimes disturbed faces of the shopping-bag women she welcomes each day.

For a traveler, suffering through a service in a dusty church far from home, a weary pastor's marvelous sermon on forgiveness brought a glimpse of God.

Paulist Father James Young told those anecdotes to bring home his conviction that many Christians find God smack dab in the midst of their hectic lives.

"God made the world — he created us to live here — and we meet God right here," said the rector of St. Paul's College during an interview at his office in Washington, D.C.

Though God turns up "in the most surprising places, in the most surprising people," Father Young tells seminarians, don't look for a "dramatic stranger

coming to the front door." Usually God "speaks to us in ordinary voices."

The priest particularly likes psychologist Dr. Joseph Goldbrunner's description of holiness: "Holiness is wholeness." What Goldbrunner means, Father Young says, is that the path to holiness for most people is "life in the world as fully involved humans."

It means growth for human beings takes place in developing talents and intelligence and spirituality by living with other people. This "brings us closer to God," Father Young said.

Working out the tasks of spirituality "involves learning to pray on your feet, in place," Father Young thinks. It means "heightening our awareness of

'...growth for human beings developing talents and intelligence by living with other people closer to God.'

Agents for the

By Father John J. Castelot
NC News Service

Jesus was the perfect agent of God's love; like all the others in the long line of such agents, Jesus was deeply involved in human affairs.

But what other agents of God became deeply involved in human affairs? Think back, for example, to

Moses. He liberated his people from oppression and slavery in Egypt. He guided them through the desert, forming them into a people. He gave them a charter, consisting mainly of civil law that covered every aspect of their existence.

Or Solomon. He was an astute political administrator, a builder, a financier.

And Isaiah. A nobleman, this prophet was intimately involved in domestic and international politics.

Moses and Solomon and Isaiah felt that in devoting themselves to human concerns they were devoting themselves to divine

concerns as well. For the heavenly Father is supremely interested in his children.

God created the universe, pronouncing it good, very good (Genesis 1:31). He entered into relationships with humanity, promising to lead it to a glorious destiny.

'Moses and Solomon and others devoting themselves to human concerns well.'

God entered our history and committed himself to it.

In fact, God loved the world so much that he gave it his only son (John 3:16). But what world was it that he loved so much? Was it some never-never world? Or was it the world of agriculture and industry, arts and sciences, politics and commerce, of loving and birthing and parenting?