

## “A Living Gospel: Reading God’s Story in Holy Lives”

Featuring **Robert Ellsberg**

---

### A Week of Reflection | Session 3: Thomas Merton

Day 1:

***“Thomas Merton was a spiritual explorer. He came to a place of recognizing that there was no final destination in this life; his home was the journey itself—a journey that would never be entirely completed in this body.”*** – Robert Ellsberg

In what ways have you experienced your spiritual life as a journey? We tend to think of home as a destination. How might this idea of ‘home being the journey itself’ resonate with an understanding of your own sense of home? How might letting go of the idea of ‘arriving’ in the spiritual life be freeing for you?

---

---

---

---

Day 2:

Ellsberg tells us that after his book, *The Seven Storey Mountain* became a best-seller, Merton became fixed in the public’s mind ***“as a young monk with his cowl pulled over his head, happily convinced that in joining an austere medieval community he had fled the modern world, never to return.”*** In reality, *The Seven Storey Mountain* represented just the beginning of his journey as a monk.

How have you dealt with others’ perceptions or expectations of you on your spiritual journey? What has been most important in helping you step into a deeper, more generous place in your journey? What has been a hindrance to you? How will you offer those limitations to God in prayer?

---

---

---

---

### Day 3:

Ellsberg contrasts two trips Merton made into Louisville, ten years apart. In the first trip, Merton felt detached, removed, and frankly bored with the community he encountered. In the second, Merton had a profound experience of union he described with these words, ***“I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness...”***

How has your heart opened wider over the course of your spiritual life? What experiences contributed to this opening? What longings rise up in your spirit as you read Merton’s words?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Day 4:

After Merton’s experience of mystical union, he said, ***“I cannot go back to the earlier fervor or the asceticism that accompanied it. The new fervor will be rooted not in asceticism but in humanism.”***

When you look back at your youth, how have your priorities in your spiritual life evolved or shifted? Have you, like Merton, come to regret any of your earlier judgments or attitudes? Consider what has helped you incorporate new insights. What has helped you move into a deeper humility?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



Day 5:

Ellsberg describes the Benedictine vow of stability this way: ***“It is a commitment not to run away when things get tough, or to imagine that life will be easier if you just don’t have to put up with all the idiots around you. What disturbs you is inside you; if you leave, you will just take it with you somewhere else.”***

At what times in your life have you experienced this discipline of stability? How have you grown by sticking it out in a challenging situation? What interior work did you realize needed attending?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Day 6:

Merton, after a season of both temptation and love, said, ***“What do I fear most? Forgetting and ignorance of the inmost truth of my being. To forget who I am, to be lost in what I am not, to fail my own inner truth, to get carried away in what is not true to me...”***

Reflect on times in your life when you felt your integrity was being challenged? How did this come to a sense of resolution for you? How has this born good fruit in your life?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

