

# THE MONASTIC WAY

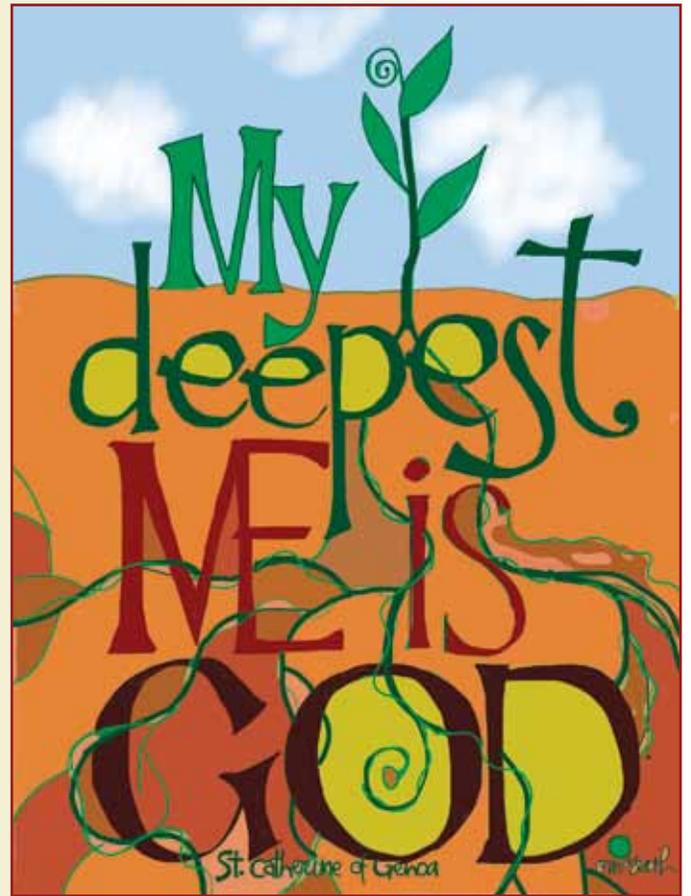
## Joan Chittister

JANUARY 2015

Art by Brother Mickey McGrath



*The Monastic Way* is for people who lead a busy life, but long for greater spiritual depth. In the 2015 monthly issues, Joan Chittister explores quotations from great spiritual figures who dealt with the same kind of soul-stretching questions that each of us do. You are invited to join her in this simple practice that takes minutes from your day but gives meaning for a lifetime.



**My Deepest Me Is God** - Catherine of Genoa

### *God within Us*

*In the center of us all, guiding and calling, prodding and poking at the lassitude in our souls, the fear in our hearts, the frettings at the bottom of our minds, lies the spark of life that we recognize most clearly as “my-self.” This is the “me” that is always there in its rawest form. The “me” of all my distant hopes and all my controlling feelings. This is the “person” that I know myself to be—whether anyone else knows that part of me or not.*

*The recognition of this self in me is the beginning of the spiritual life. With it comes the awareness of what we call the “true” self. This is the me, the one who is the vessel of both my inmost feelings, positive and negative, and my most illuminating, most uncensored insights into my reason for being, my place in the universe, my relationship with God.*

*This innermost self is the raw material of our spirituality. It signals the demons with which we struggle our way through life and it identifies the angels of our better nature who carry us from one level of the self to the next. In our “deepest” we*

*know the best and the weakest of our spiritual selves. In this place we can see where our heart really lies in life and we can name the demons with which we wage our daily wars: to be better, to do good, to live with clay feet on a divine path.*

*Our “deepest” is clearly where the real me drives me on from desire to desire. Our inner talk there is about ourselves. Our concerns, down deep, are too commonly only for ourselves. Our struggles emerge there out of the dreams and disappointments, the demands and the denials we breed with ourselves in mind. But not Catherine of Genoa’s. Her “deepest” is God. Her center of life is God. Her awareness of her basic self is her understanding of Emmanuel, God with us, always, in her.*

*The thought stuns us into a new awareness of the nature of our own lives. Here is a woman who knew without doubt that the God she sought was the God who was her very breath itself. When she turned to the “self” within she discovered the God who had created her, sustained her and drew her on through life.*

*Unusual? Not really.*

*The fact is that our “deepest” is God, too. Only it takes most of us years to discover that. The process is a profound one.*

**Thursday, January 1:** The God we seek is the God within us. From the very center of ourselves God spends all our lives calling us on—beyond the smallness of ourselves—to life bathed in the brightness of God.

**Friday, January 2:** There is nowhere we go that God is not already there. But the closest of all is in the spirit within us that speaks of life beyond the material to an immersion in its Spirit.

**Saturday, January 3:** Anything other than God that becomes our “deepest” only slows the journey to the God within.

**Sunday, January 4:** To look for God beyond and outside the center of our best selves risks drowning out the Voice of Life within. Then all the things we make God while looking for God only increase the distance between the two.

**Monday, January 5:** The spiritual life begins when the essence of life becomes more important to us than having the cosmetics of life.

**Tuesday, January 6:** The God within us, our “deepest,” is exactly what connects us to the rest of life—to other people, to nature, to wholeness of spirit. Then, what counts in life is whatever helps us to satisfy the spirit rather than simply engorge the passions which, ironically, die from overindulgence.

**Wednesday, January 7:** There is nothing that cannot feed the Spirit of God within us. But the real sign of the Spirit within us is the way we live our lives for others.

**Thursday, January 8:** The depth of our love for the unlovable, the proof of our mercy for the weak, the endurance of our compassion for the suffering, our pursuit of justice for others—that is the sign of the presence of God in us.

**Friday, January 9:** To be conscious of how people deal with other people is the surest measure of the “deepest” in all of us.

**Saturday, January 10:** Sometimes what’s “deepest” in us is pain and anger, ambition or judgment, punishment and jealousy. Then, for our own happiness, for our own liberation of soul, we must go deeper ourselves to find the God within who is also seeking us.

**Sunday, January 11:** The spiritual life is not about intelligence or education. It is certainly not about status or public position. But it is about the living awareness that, in the end, life is about growing into a relationship with God. And until we know that, we rest—we stall—in the cul-de-sac of the self. Olympia Dukakis says of it, “I think we have to be careful about what we label as a prerequisite for spirituality. I don’t think you have to know a lot to have a spiritual life, but knowing gives life richness.”

**Monday, January 12:** The spiritual life, as it was for Catherine of Genoa, is an expansive process. First it shows us the mind of God for the world. Then, it takes us far beyond ourselves to the needs of others in order to make God’s will for the world real.

**Tuesday, January 13:** To grow beyond ourselves readies us to rise above our concerns for the material parts of life. Then, we are able to learn about the spiritual dimension of being human from the rest of the universe.

**Wednesday, January 14:** The spiritual person overflows with concern for the rest of the world. As Barbara Kingsolver writes, “Empathy is the real opposite of spiritual meanness.”

**Thursday, January 15:** Without a spiritual life we are left to face both the problems of living and the powerlessness of the self to deal with them. As the Buddha taught, “Just as a candle cannot burn without fire, humans cannot live without a spiritual life.”

**Friday, January 16:** The spiritual life puts us in touch with life beyond ourselves and makes us sure of our own divine potential at the same time.

**Saturday, January 17:** Only an awareness of the presence of God in our lives can possibly bring hope for the future.

**Sunday, January 18:** The spiritual life is not what wafts us beyond what it means to be human. On the contrary, it fits us to live life to the ultimate. As Henri Nouwen says, “The spiritual life is not a life before, after, or beyond our everyday existence. No, the spiritual life can only be real when it is lived in the midst of the pains and joys of the here and now.”

**Monday, January 19:** To be fully human we must come to be fully spiritual, as well.

**Tuesday, January 20:** Life lived to its spiritual fullness is life that sees beyond itself, that understands the call to the purposeful life, that recognizes the creative power of our own humanity. The development of a spiritual life is important both to mental health and to mental expansiveness.

**Wednesday, January 21:** We are born spiritual as well as material, with a soul to sustain as well as a body. We are meant to grow to our fullest in both. As Teilhard de Chardin said, “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.”

**Thursday, January 22:** The truly spiritual person is also a contemplative person, one who sees the wonders of life, even in its darkest moments, and sets out to make those wonders available for other people everywhere.

**Friday, January 23:** Spiritual ecstasy is the state of being aware of the God-filled world of good people, growth-giving events, and essential goodness of the human heart. It puts us into a state of total contentment with life, whatever the pain and struggle it takes to reach its summit.

**Saturday, January 24:** The truly spiritual life is a life lived in gratitude for every gift of the universe, for every challenging moment that takes us out of our littleness, for every human obstacle that stretches us to the fullness of ourselves.

**Sunday, January 25:** Without a well-honed, well-developed

spiritual life, there is no real compass in life to steer by. Only a kind of hit-and-miss routine which, if we are really lucky, will in the end finally get us someplace we are meant to be.

**Monday, January 26:** The spiritual life is not a substitute for either developing good things or doing good works. It is the foundation, the well, from which we draw to direct and enrich life with both. For others as well as for ourselves.

**Tuesday, January 27:** To even think that making God the “deepest” in us means that good work is unnecessary makes the spiritual life some kind of holy fantasy land. On the contrary, the spiritual life is itself the call to take our part in the co-creation of God’s world.

**Wednesday, January 28:** The spiritual life is the filter through which holy people see the necessarily mutual connection between humans and animals, between our particular lives and all the rest of life everywhere.

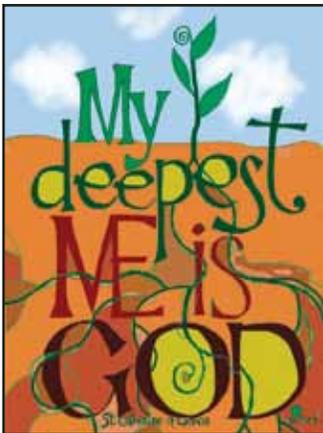
**Thursday, January 29:** It is the spiritual relationship between people that makes the physical relationship itself real. As Gandhi says, “Spiritual relationship is far more precious than physical. Physical relationship divorced from spiritual is body without soul.”

**Friday, January 30:** We are born with God pulsing through our veins. The rest of life is simply the process of coming to realize that nothing else we make God will ever be able to be God for us but that.

**Saturday, January 31:** The spiritual life is the fullness of life. On the one hand, it teaches us to live beyond the immediate to the reasons for which we were born. On the other hand, it teaches us to live well in the world, doing good, seeking justice, bringing fullness of life to everyone we meet. The Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu says of it, “Why separate your spiritual life and your practical life? To an integral being, there is no such distinction.”

— FOR A LISTENING HEART —

*My deepest me is God.*



St. Catherine of Genoa

*Spend a few minutes with this quote and then ask yourself:*

- What do these words say to me? What feelings or memories do the words evoke in me?
- What do these words say about my spiritual journey?
- My journal response to this quote is:

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**ST. CATHERINE OF GENOA**, Caterina Fieschi Adorno, born into a wealthy noble family in 1447, was married at the age of sixteen in order to end a feud between two families. Unhappy in her marriage, she spent most of her time in service to the sick and the poor, especially during an outbreak of the plague, eventually becoming director and treasurer of the hospital in Genoa. She died in 1510.



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—The Monastic Way—

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