

## Glorious Mystery

In this country, the new holds court. In this culture, it's the unusual that enthralls. In this era, "things" hold us captive.

Advertising is one of our biggest industries, one of our major pastimes. People sit and go through magazines page after page. Looking. Just looking at the latest, the biggest, the shiniest, the cleverest. Especially at technological things: things that turn on our lights and our music. Things that go fast. Things that glisten. Things that shine.

We live our lives riding a wave of wonder, in search for whatever's first in its class, the greatest of all time, the newest ideas to be found. We empty our clothes closets every year to make room for this year's styles. We live between disappointment about what we can't have and excitement over this year's catch.

Most of all, we exhaust ourselves in the process. The itch for satisfaction never goes away.

We look for glory everywhere and as things dull or age around us, it slips through our fingers while we scrape the surface of life looking for its successor.

We learn to choose the glitter of life rather than its glory, the ephemeral rather than the eternal.

But there is another way to live that steepens us in satisfaction, in peace, in the profundity of life.

The only problem is that we have to learn to look for what's under the surface rather than the patina that covers it.

We have to want glory rather than a succession of the gadgets of life.

Here's a Zen proverb:

*To the one who knows nothing about Zen,  
mountains are mountains and trees are trees.*

*When a person meditates and knows a little Zen,  
mountains are no longer mountains  
and trees are no longer trees.*

*When a person has penetrated to the heart of Zen,  
mountains are once again mountains  
and trees are once again trees.*

Think about it: Happiness is all about learning to distinguish between the superficial and the substantive. It comes from sinking into the meaning of life, the depth of its soulfulness, the meaning of the mundane in life rather than the excitement and excess of the superficial.

It is the difference between life as an activity and life as a passage from purpose to purpose.

It's about learning to look for the glory of life rather than simply its trifles and trinkets.

## The Monastic Way

Joan Chittister



## Glorious Mystery

May 2020

**Friday, May 1:** Mountains are mountains and trees are trees when we give them no importance in our life, no beauty in their being. We see them but we do not really see them at all.

**Saturday, May 2:** When a person meditates, mountains are no longer mountains and trees are no longer trees. We begin to look more deeply into the elements of life that surround us. We begin to make choices about what we want to be and do.

**Sunday, May 3:** When we have penetrated the heart of life—begin to see value, beauty and the glory of God in everyone everywhere—mountains are once

again mountains and trees are trees but we see them differently. We begin to realize the value, the beauty, the glory of every smallest sliver of life. We ourselves become part of the glory of life.

**Monday, May 4:** To realize the glory of grass is to value every blade of it. The awareness of God's presence in all of life changes the way we live. We begin to see. John Piper says of it, "The deepest longing of the human heart is to know and enjoy the glory of God. We were made for this."

**Tuesday, May 5:** Once we begin to look for value where before we saw nothing at all except the furniture of

life, we grow spiritually. Suddenly we see the glory in the mundane.

**Wednesday, May 6:** Depression and dissatisfaction are diluted by awareness that comes from consciousness of the greater good of life. Negativity drains away and the natural obstacles of life become irritations rather than impossibilities.

**Thursday, May 7:** To recognize that we ourselves live in the center of glory is to free ourselves from negativity. For all the pressures the modern world creates—traffic congestion, long lines, computerized voices on the other end of the phone—our own mental health lies in knowing that we can deal with them.

*It is the glory of Creation  
that soothes our greatest pain  
and brings our greatest calm  
in the face of stress.*

**Friday, May 8:** Situation for situation, we know that life is more about glory than it is about grief. As Gustave Flaubert puts it, “The most glorious moments in your life are not the so-called days of success but rather those days when out of dejection and despair you feel rise in you a challenge to life, and the promise of future accomplishments.”

**Saturday, May 9:** An eye for beauty is the beginning of glory. To see beauty in an old face, for instance, is to see the goodness of the life to which you yourself may aspire.

**Sunday, May 10:** To love someone is to bring glory to life. “Every moment,” Rumi writes, “is made glorious by the light of love.”

**Monday, May 11:** Love makes everyone lovable. To love and be loved is to face every moment in life knowing that whatever comes you will be able to deal with it.

**Tuesday, May 12:** We have lived in a cement and steel world for so long, we have lost our taste for the living glory of God.

**Wednesday, May 13:** The glory of God shines through the creation God created. Instead we see it as a product, an infinite resource, a servant of our wants.

**Thursday, May 14:** The natural world is the best proof we have of a loving God. As Martin Luther put it, “For in the true nature of things, if we rightly consider, every green tree is far more glorious than if it were made of gold and silver.” So, tell me again why we prefer the silver and gold to the natural world.

**Friday, May 15:** Integrity, purpose, and commitment are the pillars of the happy life. As Benjamin Franklin put it, “Virtue alone is sufficient to make a person great, glorious, and happy.”

**Saturday, May 16:** We bewail our circumstances, wildly in favor of everyone else’s life rather than our own. How sad. All that means is that we have failed to grasp the glory of the simplicities of life. “The mundane and the sacred,” Alan Watts says, “are one and the same.”

**Sunday, May 17:** The really great life is not lived in pursuit of power or wealth. It is lived best by divesting ourselves of the unnecessary, the useless, and the meaningless in order to pursue what matters.

**Monday, May 18:** Be careful what you seek in life. Bryant H. McGill says it best: “No belief or idea is sacred unless it treats all people as sacred.”

**Tuesday, May 19:** It isn’t the glorious that is glorious. It is the small things done supremely well that mark us for greatness. As Harriet Beecher Stowe writes, “To be really great in little things, to be truly noble and heroic in the insipid details of everyday life, is a virtue so rare as to be worthy of canonization.”

**Wednesday, May 20:** It’s what’s under what seems to be glorious that counts. It’s then that we see the grandeur in the mountains we once took for granted. Then it’s not glitter that captivates us, it’s quality that leads us through life.

**Thursday, May 21:** To expect glory for doing nothing of character and quality is to fool ourselves into believing that posture means more than purpose in life. “All glory,” Eugene F. Ware writes, “comes from daring to begin.”

**Friday, May 22:** Glory is not conferred; it is earned. It’s what we do to make life better for everyone that brings attention to ourselves. “Glory,” the Roman Marcus Tullius Cicero wrote, “follows virtue as if it were its shadow.”

*Love makes everyone lovable.*

**Saturday, May 23:** The very purpose of life is to teach us to deal with the glory of life—to love it, to honor and protect it, to preserve it for ages to come.

**Sunday, May 24:** We have begun to substitute the search for money for the sense of glory that comes from simply being alive. But to look for glory where it does not exist can only leave our souls dry.

**Monday, May 25:** It is in the human that we find the face of God. It’s then that we can see the glory of the universe in everyone we touch. “Earth is crammed,” Elizabeth Barrett Browning writes, “with heaven.” Crammed is the operational world. Look around you....

**Tuesday, May 26:** We have been given everything we need to find purpose and happiness in life. It all lies in learning to see that behind every living gift of every day is a gifting God.

**Wednesday, May 27:** It is the glory of Creation that soothes our greatest pain and brings our greatest calm in the face of stress. “Nature is too thin a screen,” Ralph Waldo Emerson writes. “The glory of the omnipresent God bursts through everywhere.”

**Thursday, May 28:** Life depends on the cultivation of a sense of glory. As Dōgen taught, “In the mundane, nothing is sacred. In sacredness, nothing is mundane.”

*To love and be loved  
is to face every moment in life  
knowing that whatever comes  
you will be able to deal with it.*

**Friday, May 29:** To find the glory of daily life, look at everything as if you’ve never seen it before. Then, be grateful for it. As Betty Smith put it, “Look at everything as though you were seeing it for the first time or the last time. Then your time on earth will be filled with glory.”

**Saturday, May 30:** It’s so easy to allow ourselves to get bored with life. Then, we need to acquaint ourselves again with the marvels of the mundane life. Rachel Naomi Remen reminds us that, “Teresa of Avila found difficulty at first in reconciling the vastness of the life of the spirit with the mundane tasks of her Carmelite convent. At some point of grace, the mundane became for her a sort of prayer...she then began to see the face of God in the folded sheets.”

**Sunday, May 31:** Here’s that Zen proverb again: keep reading it, keep meditating on it.

*To the one who knows nothing about Zen,  
mountains are mountains and trees are trees.*

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## Let’s Share Our Thoughts

1. Choose a sentence in this *Monastic Way* that speaks to your heart in the midst of this international pandemic. Explain your choice and its meaning to you right now.
2. Sister Joan repeats the Zen proverb twice in this issue. Why do you think she did that?
3. Sister Joan referred to the glorious as “the small things done supremely well that mark us for greatness.” (May 19) Write the following statement ten times on a sheet of paper and complete it. “The small thing I will do supremely well today is...” See if you can follow through on a few of your choices and then reflect on your experience.
4. Sister Joan urges us to “be careful what you seek in life.” What exactly are you seeking? Has it been the same all your life, or has your aim changed over time?
5. How do you give thanks for glorious things when you experience them? What way do you express your gratitude?

## Let’s Listen to Other Voices

*There are many ways to “meditate” that can help us see more deeply and become more aware: engaging in a work of art, journaling, sacred reading, taking solitary walks, saying the rosary....There are also specific sitting meditation practices that can make us more mindful. Do you practice a sitting meditation? If it’s not a current practice but you’d like to try it, here are some simple methods. Choose one and practice it for a few minutes a day. Just sit in a comfortable position and repeat a single sacred word...or be mindful of your breath going in and out...or memorize a short prayer or sacred text and repeat it slowly...or find a simple chant online and join in the chanting.*

Haiku is a poetry form that tries to capture the glory of the ordinary. It is usually 17 syllables in three lines, but most importantly it captures an “Aha” moment, a moment of awakening to what is really there, a moment that leaves you breathless. Here are a few haiku.

The taste  
Of rain  
—Why kneel?  
—Jack Kerouac

don't hit the fly—  
he prays with his hands  
and with his feet  
—Issa

What a wonderful  
Day! No one in the village  
Doing anything.  
—Shiki

the homeless man  
takes off his shoes before  
his cardboard house  
—Penny Harter

**Prompt:** Using the photo below, try writing a haiku of your own.



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“Mary of Nazareth shows us the sanctifying power of a human being who has become fully human,” Joan Chittister writes. In each month of the 2020 *Monastic Way*, Joan Chittister will focus on an aspect of Mary’s holy humanity—inner peace, compassionate relationships with others, and strength—illustrated with vibrant, multicultural paintings by Mickey McGrath, OSFS. *The Monastic Way* is for people who lead a busy life and long for greater spiritual depth.



### Let Us Pray:

Each day this month take some time to sit quietly with Brother Mickey’s painting, “Glorious Mystery” and pray: May the glory of God shine upon me. May the glory of God shine through me.

**JOAN CHITTISTER** is an internationally known author and lecturer and a clear visionary voice across all religions. She has written more than 50 books and received numerous awards for her writings and work on behalf of peace and women in church and in society.

**BROTHER MICKEY MCGRATH**, an Oblate of St. Francis de Sales, is an award-winning artist, author, and speaker whose works explore and celebrate the relationship of art, beauty, and faith. Brother Mickey travels widely from his home in Camden, NJ, leading retreats which combine his art, gospel stories, and lives of the saints. His website is [bromickeymcgrath.com](http://bromickeymcgrath.com).

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355 East Ninth St. • Erie PA 16503-1107 • T: 814-459-5994  
[benetvision@benetvision.org](mailto:benetvision@benetvision.org)

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