



Becoming Who You Are: Insights on the True Self from Thomas Merton and Other Saints

James Martin

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By meditating on personal examples from the author's life, as well as reflecting on the inspirational life and writings of Thomas Merton, stories from the Gospels, as well as the lives of other holy men and women (among them, Henri Nouwen, Therese of Lisieux and Pope John XXIII) the reader will see how becoming who you are, and becoming the person that God created, is a simple path to happiness, peace of mind and even sanctity.

Becoming Who You Are: Insights on the True Self from Thomas Merton and Other Saints Details

Date : Published by Paulist PressTM (first published September 2006)

ISBN :

Author : James Martin

Format : Kindle Edition 86 pages

Genre : Spirituality, Religion, Nonfiction, Theology, Christianity, Philosophy

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From Reader Review Becoming Who You Are: Insights on the True Self from Thomas Merton and Other Saints for online ebook

Clelia says

Coming at this as a non-Christian, I found it a little hard to relate to (although I like Thomas Merton and find him fascinating.) Martin seemed unsure of what book he was writing, and tries to blend genres in a way that doesn't really work. I'm willing to read something else by him, but this was not a great first book to try.

Ginny says

Since I find both Merton and Nouwen helpful in my spiritual journey, I thought I would read this brief book by James Martin, S. J. to see how they impacted his spiritual journey. In addition to learning more about both men, I found the conversation about the false self and true self from Merton's perspective to be helpful for me. "The false self is the person that we present to the world, the one we think will be pleading to others: attractive, confident, successful. The true self ... Is the person that we are before God. Sanctity consists in discovering who that person is and striving to become that person." I would add "with God's help".

Cathy says

I listened to the very short audio book of this and found it fascinating. As I'm getting ready to walk the Camino de Santiago, I wanted a bit of a spiritual book to read. This one got me interested in reading Thomas Merton's The Seven Storey Mountain. I love that the focus is on living every day life and becoming who you are through ordinary acts.

Janet C-B says

This is a short book by Jesuit author, James Martin, which reflects on becoming the person God intended you to be. He refers to his own life, the life of Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen and several saints to illustrate the diverse paths, obstacles, mis-steps and length of time sometimes needed to discover your "true self," who you are intended to be. I rated the book 3 stars. It seemed more like to a "refresher" to me, based on my previous reading of works by this author, Henri Nouwen and Thomas Merton.

Debra says

Having read a fair amount of Merton and Nouwen, this book missed the mark for me. The author does apologize for not being a Merton scholar or an academic and offers this short book as a meditation on the true self. To fulfill that role, it would have been better to pose reflection questions based on his experiences instead of trying to capture the essence of the "true self." Contrary to what is presented, I don't think we have to work toward being our true self as Merton defined this concept, which is that this self is how we

were created by God; thus, with interior work and awareness, our True Self will be seen.

Jaci says

A quick read by Jesuit James Martin (his most recent book is A Jesuit Guide to Almost Everything)...it is a meditation based on Thomas Merton's idea of the true self that Martin originally wrote for a lecture at Corpus Christi Church in NY, 2005.

ix: "For me to be a saint means to be myself," wrote Thoms Merton in his book New Seeds of Contemplation. "Therefore the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and discovering my true self."

p.49: I don't think that you can be a true contemplative without being utterly honest before yourself and God.

p.75: The unity of the church, both then and now, encompasses diversity.

p.87: "...remember the sacramentality of everyday life...

Good Lenten reading.

Jocelyn says

This isn't a particularly well-written book (i.e. no sources, no scholarly evidence whatsoever, repetitive). But James Martin states from the very beginning that this isn't an academic or scholarly essay, it's just a simple story; his own thoughts on living life and searching for one's true self.

Overall, it's a very brief conversation about being yourself and how that's really all God wants you to be. I thought it gave a refreshing insight on holiness and life as a Christian. I'd recommend this book to anyone in search of a simple reminder of God's love and acceptance.

Jeff says

An amazing book, and very timely for me at the stage of life I am in. Uses the backdrops of the "saints" Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, Mother Teresa and others to show how they grew in their understanding of life and become who they were created to be, rather than someone else. The author encourages us to find who God created us to be, rather than try and emulate another's path to holiness. Recognizing that each of us are called to the path of holiness but how that happens is different for each of us. And in recognizing the path that God calls us to live in, we find what God has called us and uniquely gifted us to pursue.

JasmineB says

I liked reading this book as it comes during a time of soul-searching. It highlights many pitfalls we humans usually fall into in our search for self, such as wishing to be someone else, lamenting our faults, etc. The sharing of Fr. Jim of his own experiences helped make all the abstract ideas concrete and applicable in today's world.

For those familiar with Fr. Jim's other works, there are portions which may seem repetitive from his other books. Nevertheless, new insights can still be gained from this one.

Liza Ann Acosta says

I actually heard it on audio and it was fantastic.

Maureen Milton says

Just returned from a Service Trip in Nicaragua & finished this book today. Here's what I wrote to my students & colleagues who were there.

I've so enjoyed looking at the photos of you all in Nicaragua-- holding, carrying, wheelbarrowing, playing with the children of the community.

I've spent some time upon my return from our trip considering my own experience in the community of El Jicarito, especially with my Dice Race-playing 10-year-old friend, Dixon.

How can I feel so attached to that lad, only after a few days/moments/hours in his company? What is the unlikely source of my optimistic yearning for his unknowable future?

In reading "Becoming Who You Are," by James Martin, SJ (one of the assigned Summer Reading books for rising sophomores), I came across this 1958 passage from Thomas Merton. In it, he describes his sense standing at a busy intersection in Louisville, Kentucky.

"...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 awaking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world...."

While I'm still thinking and writing about the trip, this passage helped me realize that "they [are] mine and I theirs."

Cathy says

Inspiring stories from modern day saints. James Martin is easy to follow and down to earth.

Shannon says

Becoming Who You Are was a timely read for me. I've had this book for a few months and grabbed it yesterday as I packed for some time away in silence. I read it fairly slowly, one chapter at a time. Even so, I'm sure I could re-read it and learn even more.

Fr. Martin talks simply but profoundly about true self vs false self. I loved the metaphor that our false self is like we are wrapping bandages around things we want to be rather than showing our true self or who we really are.

This was a helpful read as I try to work through some circumstances in my life and my inner resistance to being who God made me to be. This book was a good reminder that every person has a different path to holiness but we are all called to be holy - to be that true self that God created when He made us.

Martin talks about the dangers of comparison and gives examples of how many Saints and saints have lived out their holiness in many different and even contradictory ways. I highly recommend this book as a way to think about who you are and what your particular path to holiness might be. Who might your true self be?

Steve Murdock says

Similar to other reviewers, this is not written by an academic and really just scratches the surface of the concept of finding one's own spirituality in one's unique way, following loosely the examples of Merton and Nouwen. But Martin is clear on that point to start, so you go into the fairly short book knowing this. But from that intro, it takes you to an easier and clearer understanding that everyone in every life is unique by God's design, and your path is yours by God's design - unique from your neighbor's. Martin does well in making it simple to understand and provides great references for deeper reading on how you can find your path in your life. Great read, and I highly recommend it, especially as an intro to anyone trying to find his/her way.

Alexander Kwok says

Having already read Fr. Jim's "A Jesuit Off-Broadway: Behind the Scenes with Faith, Doubt, Forgiveness, and More", this book was a great next read. Fr. Martin's insights on the life and experiences of Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen, in light of his own spiritual journey to discover his "true self" really helped reinforce what his prior books have taught me about how to distinguish my "true self" from my "false self". Having had no real background of Thomas Merton or Henri Nouwen, this book also provided an excellent primer to their thoughts, experiences, and writings, through Fr. Jim's eyes.

My only real issue with this book is that as he had finished it shortly after writing "A Jesuit Off-Broadway", some of the passages in "Becoming Who You Are" seemed to heavily borrow from his previous book, specifically the section on Christology. While I had no issue following along, having read "A Jesuit Off-Broadway" before, I found that he could have added more insight to that section, even though the point he makes about Jesus' self-awareness really fit into this book.

All in all, I would strongly recommend this book to someone who is trying to figure out what their "vocation" in life is or anyone who wishes to start anew and discover where it is that God, and a deeper relationship with Jesus, is calling them. Like Fr. Jim emphasizes, this doesn't need to lead to a religious calling, but it can be something that calls us to find the holiness within ourselves.
