



The Cloister Walk

By Kathleen Norris

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A NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER AND NEW YORK TIMES NOTABLE BOOK OF THE YEAR

“Vivid, compelling... An embrace of moral and spiritual contemplation.” –*The New York Times*

“A remarkable piece of writing. If read with humility and attention, Kathleen Norris's book becomes lectio divina, or holy reading.” –*The Boston Globe*

From the iconic author of *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith*, a spiritual journey that brings joy to the meanings of love, grace and faith.

Why would a married woman with a thoroughly Protestant background and often more doubt than faith be drawn to the ancient practice of monasticism, to a community of celibate men whose days are centered on a rigid schedule of prayer, work, and scripture? This is the question that poet Kathleen Norris asks us as, somewhat to her own surprise, she found herself on two extended residencies at St. John's Abbey in Minnesota.

Part record of her time among the Benedictines, part meditation on various aspects of monastic life, *The Cloister Walk* demonstrates, from the rare perspective of someone who is both an insider and outsider, how immersion in the cloistered world-- its liturgy, its ritual, its sense of community-- can impart meaning to everyday events and deepen our secular lives. In this stirring and lyrical work, the monastery, often considered archaic or otherworldly, becomes immediate, accessible, and relevant to us, no matter what our faith may be.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

In the tradition of Thomas Merton, Kathleen Norris gives us an intimate look at how religious life fills a gap in the soul. Her poetic sensibilities internalize the monastery as a symbol of spirituality, with its sanctity and humor, questioning and uncertainty, rhythm and vigor. Beyond moral precepts and Bible stories, *Cloister Walk* is a very personal account of religion lived fully. It depicts a depth and beauty of spirituality in monastic life that has survived the vicissitudes of Roman Catholic politics and pomp.

From Publishers Weekly

The allure of the monastic life baffles most lay people, but in her second book Norris (Dakota) goes far in explaining it. The author, raised Protestant, has been a Benedictine oblate, or lay associate, for 10 years, and has lived at a Benedictine monastery in Minnesota for two. Here, she compresses these years of experience into the diary of one liturgical year, offering observations on subjects ranging from celibacy to dealing with emotions to Christmas music. Like the liturgy she loves, this meandering, often repetitive book is perhaps best approached through the *lectio divina* practiced by the Benedictines, in which one tries to "surrender to whatever word or phrase captures the attention." There is a certain nervous facility to some of Norris's jabs at academics, and she is sometimes sanctimonious. But there is no doubting her conviction, exemplified in her defense of the much-maligned Catholic "virgin martyrs," whose relevance and heroism she wants to redeem for feminists. What emerges, finally, is an affecting portrait—one of the most vibrant since Merton's—of the misunderstood, often invisible world of monastics, as seen by a restless, generous intelligence.
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From Library Journal

Norris's acuity, writing talent, and ten years as an oblate at a Catholic Benedictine monastery have well equipped her to enlighten outsiders to the true ways and spirit of monastic life or, as she refers to it, the real world. Norris, a Protestant, describes how community life is the essence of humanity and celibacy an opportunity for transformation. She demonstrates the applicability of ancient scriptures and liturgies to modern times and tells how daily psalm-reading and prayer, ceremonies, and rituals helped her to overcome depression and gain inner peace. Norris, herself a poet, draws many parallels between the monastic and the poet, both of whom are fine-tuned to see the sacred potential in all things. Actress Debra Winger reads Norris's refreshing and highly inspirational book. For popular spirituality collections. —Barbara J. Vaughan, State Univ. Coll. at Buffalo Lib., N.Y.
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Users Review

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Kimberly Mason:

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