



A weekly reflection by members of the Precious Blood Community

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Dennis Coday

“They began to excuse themselves.”

In today’s gospel, we read:

“A man gave a great dinner to which he invited many.
When the time for the dinner came,
he dispatched his servant to say to those invited,
‘Come, everything is now ready.’

But one by one, they all began to excuse themselves.” — Luke 14: 16-18

At Precious Blood Renewal Center in Liberty, Missouri, a group of us meet weekly to study the teachings of Thomas Merton, the 20th-century Trappist monk who wrote and taught about the contemplative life. We are using a series of booklets called *Bridges to Contemplative Living with Thomas Merton*. Each section of the booklet pairs a piece of Merton’s writings with the words of another thinker, teacher, or mystic.

One recent week, an excerpt from Merton’s *Raids on the Unspeakable* was paired with an excerpt from Rabbi Abraham Herschel’s *Quest for God*. The rabbi wrote: “We do not refuse to pray; we abstain from it.” That sentence made me stop reading. I had to sit and think about it. We do not *refuse* to pray. We *abstain* from it.

Prayer is God inviting us into an intimate embrace, a deeper experience of dwelling with the Divine. And what do we do with that invitation?

If you’re like me, most of the time, when I hear this gospel reading, I think of myself as the folks from the “streets and alleys” or the “highways and hedgerows.” Of course, I tell myself, I’d go to the feast. I wouldn’t be so dumb as to miss the greatest dinner party ever! Who in their right mind would turn that down?

Who would turn that down? Too often — Herschel and Merton remind us — we would. We do. The thing is, we don’t reject the invitation outright. We don’t tear up the invitation and throw it to the ground. We don’t refuse it. No, we just ignore it. We abstain. We make excuses. We just don’t show up.

Lucky for us, God only sends open invitations. I can always show up to God's feast and know that I will have a seat at the table. Like the Prodigal Son, God will embrace me. I just have to show up.

Dennis Coday has done communication and marketing work for [Precious Blood Renewal Center](#) in Liberty, Missouri, since 2019 but his family ties to the Precious Blood extend farther back in history. He attended Precious Blood Seminary High School and college formation at Rockhurst University. His brother Fr. Timothy Coday has served in Tanzania for more than 35 years.

This weekly reflection is made available to all who are part of our Precious Blood family. Feel free to share it with others. Would you be willing to write a reflection? If so, please contact Vicky Otto at votto@pbspiritualityinstitute.org