**The Imitation of Christ by Thomas A. Kempis**

**BOOK ONE:** THOUGHTS HELPFUL IN THE LIFE OF THE SOUL

**Chapter 17: Monastic Life**

**Definition and Scriptures:**

**Christian monasticism:** is the devotional practice of [Christians](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christians) who live [ascetic](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asceticism#Christianity) and typically cloistered lives that are dedicated to Christian worship. It began to develop early in the history of the [Christian Church](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Church), modeled upon scriptural examples and ideals, including those in the [Old Testament](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Testament), but not mandated as an institution in the scriptures. It has come to be regulated by religious rules (e. g. [the Rule of Saint Augustine](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Rule_of_Saint_Augustine), [Anthony the Great](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthony_the_Great), [St Pachomius](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pachomius_the_Great), the [Rule of St Basil](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rule_of_St_Basil), the [Rule of St Benedict](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rule_of_St_Benedict),) and, in modern times, the [Canon law](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canon_law) of the respective [Christian denominations](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_denomination) that have forms of monastic living. Those living the monastic life are known by the generic terms [monks](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monk) (men) and [nuns](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuns) (women). The word *monk* originated from the Greek [μοναχός](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%CE%BC%CE%BF%CE%BD%CE%B1%CF%87%CF%8C%CF%82#Ancient_Greek) (*monachos*, 'monk'), itself from [μόνος](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%CE%BC%CF%8C%CE%BD%CE%BF%CF%82%22%20%5Cl%20%22Ancient_Greek%22%20%5Co%20%22wikt%3A%CE%BC%CF%8C%CE%BD%CE%BF%CF%82) (*monos*) meaning 'alone'.

Monks did not live in monasteries at first, rather, they began by living alone, as the word *monos* might suggest. As more people took on the lives of monks, living alone in the wilderness, they started to come together and model themselves after the original monks nearby. Quickly, the monks formed communities to further their ability to observe an [ascetic](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ascetic) life. According to Christianity historian Robert Louis Wilken, "By creating an alternate social structure within the Church they laid the foundations for one of the most enduring Christian institutions..." Monastics generally dwell in a [monastery](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monastery), whether they live there in a community ([cenobites](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cenobitic_monasticism)), or in seclusion ([recluses](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Recluse)). (wikipedia.org)

**John 17:13-19:** Now I’m returning to you. I’m saying these things in the world’s hearing So my people can experience My joy completed in them. I gave them your word; The godless world hated them because of it, because they didn’t join the world’s ways, Just as I didn’t join the world’s ways. I’m not asking that you take them out of the world but that you guard them from the Evil One. They are no more defined by the world Than I am defined by the world. Make them holy—consecrated—with the truth; Your word is consecrating truth. In the same way that you gave me a mission in the world, I give them a mission in the world. I’m consecrating myself for their sakes So they’ll be truth-consecrated in their mission.

**John 4:23:**  But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

**Matthew 20:1-16:** “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. “About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So, they went. “He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. About five in the afternoon, he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ “When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ “The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So, when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ “But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ “So, the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

**Quote:**

“IF YOU wish peace and concord with others, you must learn to break your will in many things. To live in monasteries or religious communities, to remain there without complaint, and to persevere faithfully till death is no small matter. Blessed indeed is he who there lives a good life and there ends his days in happiness."

**Discussion:**

Living in isolation, being in the world and not of it, and being a servant of all is the monastic way of life. How can the heart attitude of the monastic way of living be fertile ground for the seed of faith to grow?

God’s kingdom is not based on peer pressure; rather, it is based on unmerited favor. In order to receive God’s unmerited favor, we must accept the fact that God treats everybody the same. What is unmerited favor? How have you received unmerited favor? How do we give unmerited favor?