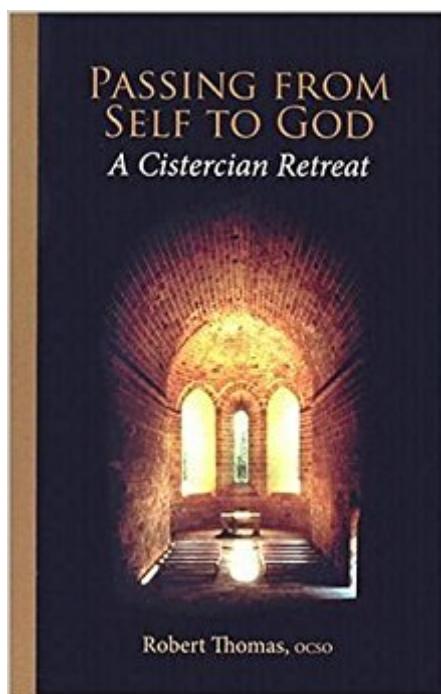


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# Passing From Self To God: A Cistercian Retreat (Monastic Wisdom Series)



## **Synopsis**

Those seeking to deepen their spiritual lives by visiting monasteries rarely have enough time to absorb as much as they would like. In this book an experienced spiritual master provides an intensive directed retreat which relies heavily on the rich Cistercian spiritual tradition. Readers may read and digest at their own pace, savoring the author's contagious enthusiasm for the monastic way and the medieval monks who formed this distinctive contemplative tradition. Robert Thomas, a monk of Sept-Fons from 1928 until his death in 2002, served as prior of his community, professor of theology and Sacred Scripture, and chaplain to Cistercian nuns. He was instrumental in translating the early Cistercian Fathers into modern languages.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

This book delivers on its promise . . . It would be best read slowly, day by day, theme by theme while meditation on its directives over the course of a silent, intensive, solitary retreat. . . . This book is deep and wise. Cistercian Studies Quarterly Here we have what promises to be a modern classic . . . Antony Grant CR Quarterly Review of the Community of the Resurrection

Robert Thomas, a monk of Sept-Fons from 1928 until his death in 2002, served as prior of his community, professor of theology and Sacred Scripture, and chaplain to Cistercian nuns. He was instrumental in translating the early Cistercian Fathers into modern languages.

Best book ever written! Thanks for the prompt delivery I may buy other copies to give as gifts.

Spiritually a great read!

This book gently leads a person into an acceptance of frailties without guilt-mongering. It was refreshing and uplifting.

After a Trappist monk recommended to me Fr. Robert Thomas's book, *PASSING FROM SELF TO GOD: A CISTERCIAN RETREAT*, I started to peruse it as spiritual reading, then decided to set it aside until recently, when I used it as the structure for a self-directed retreat at a local Trappist monastery. In this book, Fr. Thomas guides the retreatant to find God within oneself and there to "forget" oneself in God. In this way, the retreatant makes it all about God and not about oneself, about "me." Fr. Thomas sums it up in this way: "A holy self-mocking saying...is to say to yourself, 'There is nothing but God, what does the rest matter to us?'" (p. 77). With this in mind, one does not obsess about sinning or about following God's will, because with God in sight one will be on the right path. Fr. Thomas uses as an example a math teacher who was able to draw a straight line without the use of an aid like a straight edge. The teacher explained that he starts drawing the line with his chalk at the lower left hand of the chalkboard and, not looking at his hand, focuses on the other point at the upper right hand of the blackboard. In the same way, focusing all on God, everything falls into place. Fr. Thomas also cites a dialogue between St. Francis and Brother Leo along this same vein. Whereas Brother Leo regards "purity of heart" as "not having any fault with which to reproach oneself," and is thereby sad and frustrated, St. Francis tells him to "Turn your gaze toward God. Admire him. Rejoice in what He is, He, all holiness. Thank him because of himself. Having a pure heart is exactly that, little brother" (p. 11). That is the simple idea behind this book. And so, Fr. Thomas leads the retreatant to reflect on various aspects of that new attitude, that reorienting of the self. Chapters take up meditations on "resting in the heart of Christ," moving "from multiplicity to unity" (e.g. knowledge to wisdom, distractions of the world to God), humility and being like children, "praising God," "doing the will of God," "believing in the love of God," and one that I found a bit jarring in its imagery, "passing from the old man to the new." It's not the idea of letting the old self (e.g., love of the world, excessive concern for the body, a life of sin, defense of sin (i.e., making excuses) die away, or to put it another way, recognizing its obsolescence, that struck me as odd, but the language Fr. Thomas uses or borrows, going so far as to refer to "killing the old man"

and even crucifying him (pp. 93, 94). But that's the rare flat note in an otherwise beautiful hymn to unity with God. PASSING FROM SELF TO GOD contains many citations from 11th- and 12th-century Cistercian writers, along with the occasional references to other spiritual traditions such as the Franciscan one noted above. These passages are well utilized to expand on Fr. Thomas's points, and only rarely do they not seem so fresh and relevant. Some of the book is perhaps more appropriately addressed to the Cistercian monk on retreat than to the secular Christian, but all will find much to reflect on in this jewel of contemporary Cistercian spiritual writing. I found Fr. Thomas's words to be profoundly moving; his book provided a perfect structure for my retreat.

For those who seek to deepen their knowledge of the Cistercian charism and to experience the living Cistercian monastic tradition, there is no better book in English today. Truly, this book is like a retreat with the Cistercian Fathers themselves and a master class with a Cistercian senior. I found it a book to read slowly and to ponder and pray over and to return to again and again.

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