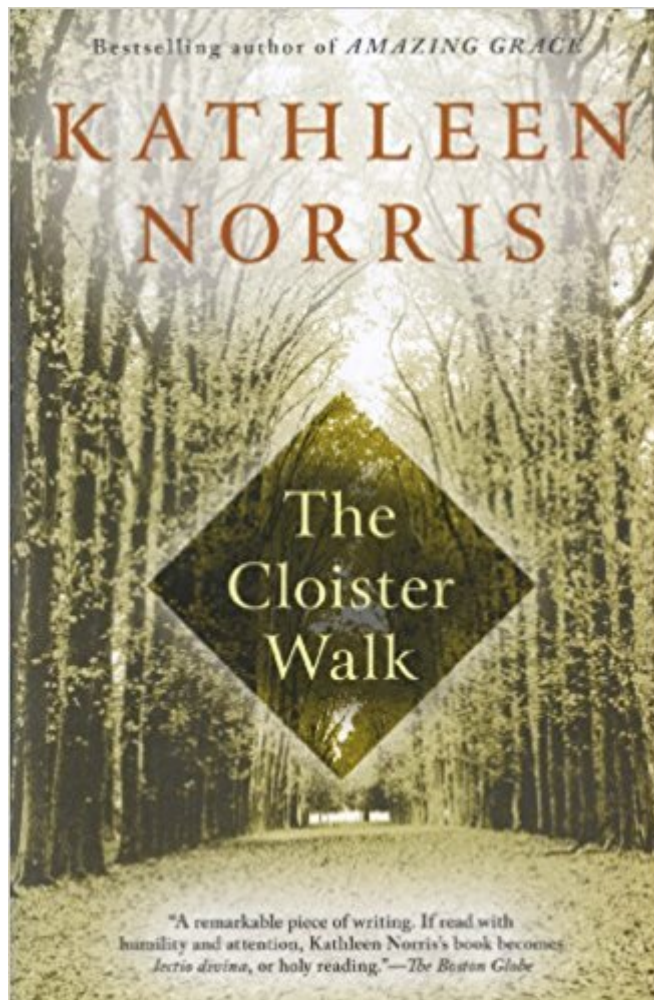


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The Cloister Walk



Synopsis

“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.”

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

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.

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. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Read this book slowly and savor it and reflect on it. Norris does not try to persuade you or convince you of anything. Instead, she details some portion of her spiritual journey and a lot of research lying behind what she encounters. If you feel any attraction to the spiritual life, explore it with her as she spends time both in retreat in a monastery and in the world of the Dakotas. The book is written in short chapters and thus is easy to read in bits and pieces, but after while this reader became so enamored of the reflective and the divine within these pages that she just wanted to live in the book.

One of the elements of Kathleen Norris which makes reading her so fundamentally satisfying is her ability to weave the words and thoughts of others so seamlessly into her own observations of endeavoring to live a life of faith. "*The Cloister Walk*" seems to do this with greater facility and to greater effect than "*Dakota: A Spiritual Geography*." In "*The Cloister Walk*," Norris, an apathetic Christian turned agnostic turned yearning Protestant, relates her experiences (physical and spiritual)

as an oblate with the Benedictines. This is an accessible memoir of one woman's account of opening the eyes of her heart in her search for God and one that can be enjoyed by anyone striving to hear a still small voice within.

As a lapsed Catholic and a searching person for the meaning of organized religion in my life, I found this book rich with bursts of insight. The various personalities in religion; aspects of life within the Benedictine church; and a variety of small, beautiful critical thinking essays on the meanings of icons and values are some of the topics Norris explores in her chapters. Overall, they are thought-provoking and reveal a person who is more than a visitor to the ways of the Benedictine. I only gave four stars, since I found her writing style a bit distracting and the organization of the book not exactly conducive to easy reading. It's true that each chapter is a handful, but the editor might have done Norris a favor by facilitating the outline of the book.

This is a book that I thought I could read straight through and move on to the next novel on my TBR list, but it wasn't that simple. Norris has the poet's eye for insight and the material written here includes some beautifully written prose with keen observations on life and humanity. The reflective nature of the book caused me to pause between sections to let her stories and observations sink in. While she writes about monastic life, she doesn't romanticize it. Instead, we're drawn to examine our own rituals and religious practices through new eyes that add meaning and significance. If you're a fan of authors such as Thomas Merton I recommend giving this book a slow and thoughtful read.

Loved it. very beautifully written. Her emotional and spiritual feelings about all those and things she encounters are moving. I recommend this book to people who like to ponder again and again what they read and think about its affect it has on the reader.

The Cloister Walk has some good moments, particularly with regard to the Benedictine community and community in general. However, for all her references to metaphor, she does not present liturgy and the Eucharist in those terms. In fact, she does not address the Eucharist at all. She also spends too much time dealing with the paucity of trees in the Midwest. The book also contains a number of usage errors.

I borrowed a library copy of this book and liked it so much. It has the potential to be a private study book. When I returned the library their copy I went out and bought my own book.

A RING OF TRUTH: Like Kathleen Norris, I am a Protestant who lives in a small town and have been heavily influenced by being a guest in a Benedictine Monastery many times. Like Norris, I have been invited into the cloister. Her account has the ring of authenticity. By the time I finished the book I realized I was reading while listening to the CD of chants prepared at the monastery I most often visit. **WHO WILL LIKE THIS BOOK?** Norris is a poet. This book is a collection of sketches from inside the monastery, from monastic history, from her own small town, from her vacations, and from the cities she has lived and worked in. Some chapters are long, while others are short. Her themes bounce from chapter to chapter. If you like poetic imagery written in prose and are interested in this theme, you will like this book. **WHO WILL NOT LIKE THIS BOOK?** If you like to read technical manuals and books with finely structured outlines, you will probably not like this book. You may feel that Norris rambles too much and doesn't stay with her main point.

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