

## LCG Lenten Book/Digital Suggestions:

- How to Live: What the Rule of St. Benedict Teaches Us About Happiness, Meaning, and Community: [https://smile.amazon.com/How-Live-Benedict-Happiness-Community/dp/1571747982/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=Judith+valente&qid=1611362790&s=books&sr=1-1](https://smile.amazon.com/How-Live-Benedict-Happiness-Community/dp/1571747982/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=Judith+valente&qid=1611362790&s=books&sr=1-1)
- Sacred Space for Lent 2021 [https://www.amazon.com/Sacred-Space-Lent-Irish-Jesuits/dp/0829450173/ref=tmm\\_pap\\_swatch\\_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=1611362517&sr=1-2-spons](https://www.amazon.com/Sacred-Space-Lent-Irish-Jesuits/dp/0829450173/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=1611362517&sr=1-2-spons)
- Bishop Robert Barron's *Daily Lenten Reflections* can be sent to your email by going to LentReflections.com and signing up. <https://www.lentreflections.com>
- *A Way other than Our Own: Devotions for Lent*: Walter Brueggemann: Amazon <https://www.amazon.com/Way-other-than-Our-Own/dp/0664261698>
- *In All Seasons for All Reasons: Praying Throughout the Year*, by Father James Martin. A collection of short reflections from his "Teach Us to Pray" column in Give Us This Day, focusing on different ways one can pray. The total reading is about 70 pages so it's a good size for the Lenten season.
- *To Know Christ Jesus*, by Frank Sheed. This modern spiritual classic is brought back into print for the benefit of new generations of readers to develop a deeper, more profound knowledge of Jesus Christ. Sheed's concern with the Gospels is to come to know Christ as he actually lived among us, interacted with all the various people he encountered from his infancy to his passion and death--the God-man who was like us in all things except sin. Sheed has tried especially to see Our Lord in his effect upon others--seeing how they saw him, trying to see why they saw him so.
- ***Lent with the Saints*** With insightful reflections, Fr. Greg Friedman draws on his love of the saints to offer daily inspiration during this season of repentance, forgiveness, and hope. Connect and pray with the Church's most beloved saints and holy people—Thomas Merton, Augustine, Francis, Clare, Damien of Molokai, Teresa of Calcutta, and Gianna Molla, to name a few!  
<https://shop.franciscanmedia.org/collections/lent-titles/products/lent-with-the-saints-daily-reflections>
- *We Are All Poets Here*, Kathleen W. Tarr [https://smile.amazon.com/We-Are-All-Poets-Here/dp/1578336910/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?dchild=1&keywords=we+are+all+poets+here&qid=1613489795&sr=8-1](https://smile.amazon.com/We-Are-All-Poets-Here/dp/1578336910/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=we+are+all+poets+here&qid=1613489795&sr=8-1)

Spiritual autobiography is a genre of writing with a long and diverse history filled with recognizable individuals and texts including St. Augustine's **Confessions**, St. Theresa of Avila's **Story of a Soul**, to the 20th century's Victor Frankl's **Man's Search for Meaning**, C.S. Lewis' **Surprised by Joy**, and Thomas Merton's **Seven Story Mountain** (and personal journals). Spiritual autobiography deals with the basic, existential questions of who we are, why we are, where we are going, how we are progressing. Ultimately, authors are dealing with their relationship to the Divine Majesty, or the sacred dimension within their heart and soul. Spiritual autobiographies seek to uncover or unconceal that which is sacred within the writers' life by probing the deepest mysteries by prose or poetry. Finally, the author's "aim or purpose" is to motivate others to begin their search for "the Ineffable", "the Divine" or "the Holy" in their life journey.

Kathleen Witkowski Tarr has written a modern spiritual autobiography entitled "**We are All Poets Here**" (WAAPH). Tarr's WAAPH is an evocative, vivid description of a meandering, wondering life story that begins in Pittsburgh, PA, moves to the Florida coast and concludes in a Tlingit village in Alaska. Tarr's hope was to write an honest story about a contemporary spiritual journey from a deeply personal perspective. Tarr admits to being spiritually dislocated, spiritually dazed, a confused wonderer in search for someone, something to assuage her inner longing or quest for peace, fulfillment, contentment in a world filled with disillusion, emptiness, and hopelessness. WAAPH documents the people, experiences that slowly guided her decisions, movements, and events on her spiritual journey. Providence ordained Tarr to come upon the works of the quintessential paradox of a monk, Thomas Merton. A convert to Catholicism with a classical education from Cambridge and Columbia University, Merton became a constant reading source for Tarr – acting as a "spiritual mentor, or guide". Acutely, WAAPH details many of the issues tearing at the fabric of contemporary life: social injustice, racism, social ills due to narrow minded institutionalism, mass mind and crass commercialism, were issues Merton addressed throughout his writings fifty – to –sixty years ago. (especially his writings during the mid-sixties that were censored at the time of their writing) Tarr, with acute clarity, details the society of Merton's years and writings, the sheer expansive number of correspondences with socio-polico-theological primary sources and their relation to our contemporary age.

Kathleen Tarr's strength is her ability to write an existential phenomenological description of the spiritual journey. Tarr addresses, describes, defines and articulates our chaotic and confusing times with a desire for readers to examine their own spiritual journey, their own interior lives. WAAPH addresses contemporary alienation and dislocation as the loss of our sacred vision that separates the profane from the sacred. Utilizing Alaskan traditions, inviting the reader to "listen in" with her interactions with local Alaskan residents, Tarr vividly details how the "existential void" that exists between the sacred and profane can be transcended so as to continue our own spiritual biography.

WAAPH envisions Alaska as a never-ending source of hope and transformation. Kathleen Tarr describes Alaska as "one, big holy mountain" - easy to get lost in its terrain and its nature may be cruel. Yet, if an individual can release themselves from

urban/suburban conventions, enabling the heart and soul to experience the seas, landscapes and mountains, personal transformation, spiritual awakening and growth becomes a reality.

In the end, Kathleen Tarr is a writer-poet at heart. The vivid, concise and detailed descriptions of person, place, and experience within WAAPH testifies to her credentials as a writer, but she offers so much more to readers. Tarr invokes or invites her readers, by creating imagery (poetically), to deeply

held meanings. Frequently, spiritual autobiographies utilize “implicative lacunae”, referring to the multiple presented layers in writing creating many meaningful layers of reception or perceptions. Tarr’s WAAPH is multi-layered with description, dialogue, and poetry so it may be received, or perceived in a variety of ways by a variety of readers, thereby creating or confirming individual interpretations, emotional, visceral, or “academic” meanings, thoughts or beliefs.

WAAPH is not a simple collection of stories, nor of “anecdotes” - it is a revelation of Kathleen Tarr of her spiritual self-discovery and her explicit hope, wish and desire for others to “know the Sacred within their own heart and soul”.

In September 1968’s “**Circular letter for friends**”, Thomas Merton stated “our real journey in life is interior: it is a matter of growth, deepening and of an ever-greater surrender to the creative action of love and grace in our hearts ...” Later, In December of 1968, Merton “finds” a clearer “beauty and spiritual validity running together in one aesthetic illumination ... Polownarua”. Merton writes in his **Asian Journal**, “Polownarua has become clearer and purified ... I mean, I know, and see what I was obscurely looking for. I don’t know what else remains, but I have now seen and have pierced through the surface and I have got beyond the shadows and the disguise ...” (pgs 233-236). WAAPH is Kathleen Tarr’s journey that has “pierced through the surface” and has shown what she was “obscurely looking for ...” under Tarr’s archetype Mt. St. Elias within the St. Elias mountain range as well as the Chugach mountains of Alaska.

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**Below are Fr. Michael’s reflections on this practice and how it is practiced at Gethsemani.**

+LENTEN READING, *the Practice and Gethsemani*

Every year on the first Sunday of Lent, each member of the Gethsemani community receives a book at the end of the morning Chapter, that he is to use as his Lenten reading. A couple weeks before this day the Abbot will announce that each of us should select a book for Lenten reading and put it at his office door. This gives him a chance to

be sure it is appropriate and if nothing has been given him, he himself will pick a book for the brother as Lenten reading. A few prefer the abbot to pick something for them. These are placed in various piles around the Chapter room and a few designated brothers distribute them when asked to do so. There is the old custom of bowing to the person who gives you your Lenten book as a sacred gift.

Regarding the practice, it is brought up in the Rule where Benedict gives a chapter on the Daily Manual Labor. St Benedict is obviously putting it into this context to remind the monk that it is important for him to maintain a balance between prayer (public and private) manual labor and lectio divina. In Lent Benedict allows extra time in the morning for the monks to read. He knows well the power of the Word to change our lives, to aid the ongoing conversion that is given extra emphasis during this season. To designate a book as "to be read the whole of it straight through" is saying more than we may first realize. It is to move us into a sense of the sacredness of the reading that will expose us to the Word of God whom we will meet in the reading. We are not to jump around at whim but read it straight through so that we are being the ones who are being read as much as doing the reading. Effective lectio divina is where the word comes off the page and reveals us in the eyes of God, enabling us to take a close look at the values we hold or aspire to and how we are living them. Before beginning to read there is the custom of saying a prayer so as to be disposed to this presence of God's Word.

Designating a time for this each day gets us to stop our normal routines and being in control of our lives. It gives us the time to sit and reflect, to let a sacred book inspire us in such a way that we personally taste more of Christ the living Word of God. Lectio early on was done mostly with the Scriptures as texts. In fact, Benedict's community had few books to start with, mostly being various books of the Scriptures or commentaries on them. So any book we choose today should have content that comes out an in depth experience of the Scriptures, something that will challenge us like the Scriptures themselves will do. A favorite Lenten book early on around Gethsemani was the Life of Christ by Romano Guardini, the ideal was to give us a fresh look at the living Word of God.

Let me add one further thought about Lenten reading in regards to our practice at Gethsemani. As a community we do this of an evening, every evening except on Sunday when one is free to do as one likes. The other days, the Lenten reading begins at 6:45 of an evening and lasts until 7:25 when we head off for Compline. If one likes, he may stop the reading at 7:15 and go pray with it until Compline time. Most stay with the reading until Compline. How one does the reading is again up to the individual, we are free to stop and reflect anywhere along the line or just pray where one is seated as the Spirit moves. The time honored "technique" of Lectio is the reading, meditating, prayer and contemplation. The most valuable way of doing it is to allow any combination of the four aspects as the Spirit leads one.

