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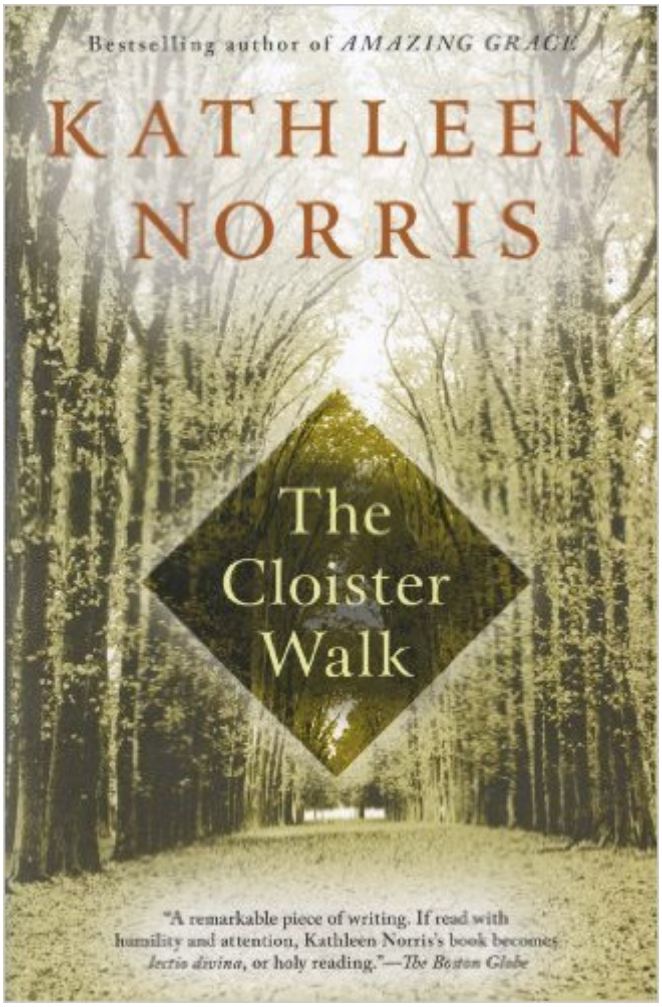
The Cloister Walk



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Synopsis

Â A NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER AND NEW YORK TIMES NOTABLE BOOK OF THE YEARâ œVivid, compelling... An embrace of moral and spiritual contemplation.â • â “The New York Timesâ œA remarkable piece of writing. If read with humility and attention, Kathleen Norris’s book becomes lectio divina, or holy reading.â •Â â “The Boston GlobeFrom the iconic author of Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith, a spiritual journey that brings joy to the meanings of love, grace and faith.Â 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

For many people, Kathleen Norris’ story is somewhat familiar. She was raised in a faith tradition as a child, abandoned her faith, or at least put her faith on hold, then rediscovers her faith as an adult. Norris’ experience is hardly typical, but it is definitely not "the same old story" with a different person

telling it. Norris rediscovers faith accidentally, but it is not the Protestant faith of her youth. She is now a Protestant whose faith is colored by Roman Catholicism, particularly the Benedictine monastic tradition in Catholicism.Norris is a writer whose primary genre has been poetry. In 1991, she spent a year at a Benedictine monastery in Minnesota and entered into the life of this monastic community. From time to time she also traveled to her home and to various parts of the country for conferences or speaking engagements. The book is taken from reflections of that experience. In the book, she is connected to her life outside the monastery while at the monastery and while away from the monastery, she still seems to be very present to the life of the monastery. The life in the monastery has a certain pattern to it, based on the Rule of St. Benedict. The year follows a calendar, but it is the calendar of the Roman Martyrology which lists the days that various saints and religious feasts are remembered. The Liturgy of the Hours, chanted by the monks is essential to the life of the monastery as is time for personal prayer and reflection. As both an insider (as a person connected to the monastery) and an outsider (a Protestant woman in an all male Catholic community), Norris is able to make keen insights into the life of the monastery with a unique perspective.This is a book that should be read from cover to cover when the book is read for the first time.

Even most christians today seem to find the idea of the monastery archaic, extreme and unappealing. Here, Ms Norris, a hesitant believer, makes the convent seem appealing, beautiful and full of wisdom.Once you get past the gimmick - a modern poet finding centering in a monastery - there is still much to like about this book. It is a combination of a lot of things - a painfully personal journal, a catalog of discoveries and musings, a polished essay on laundry that was published in the New Yorker, and several brilliant pieces that stand as academic writing, ready for a feminist publication or academic journal.I think the latter were my favorite. It is informative and enjoyable to find Ms. Norris taking on the virgin martyrs, looking at catholic history and practice with a modern feminist eye, and finding much to like, and much to weep over. Another similar essay comparing the role of biblical prophets and modern day poets (both dwellers on the "margin" of society, yet deeply necessary to that society) is also excellent.Norris' respect for the Word is wonderful, as well. She writes much and often about the poetry of the Bible - psalms, Jeremiah - and how they fit and fill her life. She brings new life to what, for many of us, have been wrongly dead words.Her reflections on the monastery are good. She gives monks and nuns an earthy reality, talking about their quirks, their sense of humor, their doubts and struggles as well as their achievements, discipline, and success. She spends a fair amount of time digging into the heritage and history of monasticism and

christianity - apparently she is reading Christian classics as she is living at the monastery - and I learned much about ancient monks, martyrs, and saints.

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