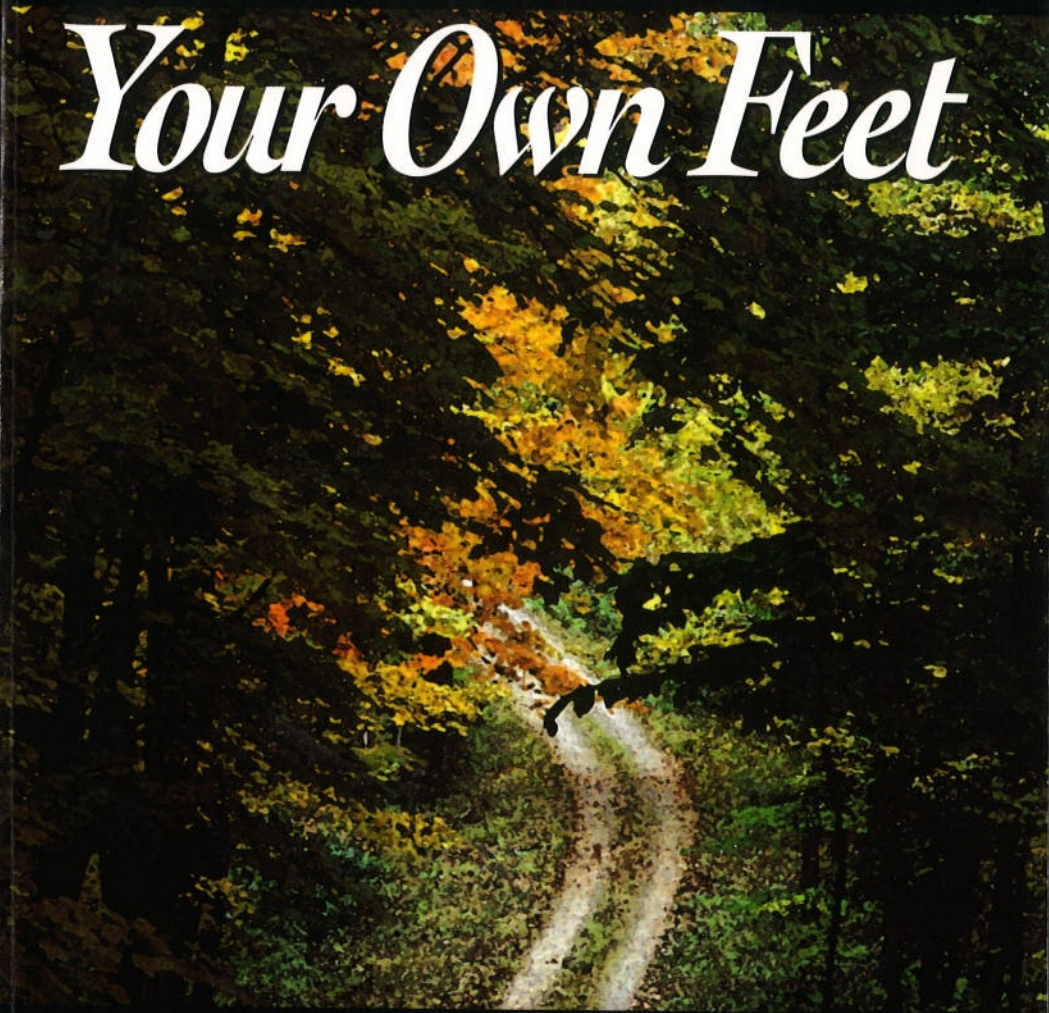


Introduction by David Steindl-Rast

Stand On Your Own Feet



Finding a Contemplative Spirit in Everyday Life

Natalie Smith

Stand on Your Own Feet is a book about basics, yet it is not for beginners only. Time and again, all of us need to go back to the basics and make a new beginning. As we practice the prayer that changes the world, we ourselves will be changed.

Brother David Steindl-Rast, O.S.B.
from the *Introduction*

Stand on Your Own Feet


Finding a Contemplative Spirit in Everyday Life

"Natalie Smith's challenging book addresses the 'anonymous monk' in everyone. Her message, which is presented here in a lively poetic prose, emphasizes the essentials of Christian living in love, peace, and forgiveness. It should have an appeal for all who seek the one thing necessary, whether living inside or outside monastic walls. Highly recommended."

Brother Patrick Hart, O.C.S.O.
General Editor, *Thomas Merton Journals*

Learn how to maintain a deep spirit of recollection in your life with this detailed yet practical book. The title, *Stand on Your Own Feet*, comes from Thomas Merton's final address in Bangkok, Thailand—each one of us is responsible for our own baptismal calling. Through this book the author is passing on a way of prayerful living that stands on its own under any circumstances, a way for busy people to live holy lives no matter their personal situation or profession. Her intention is to help readers discover who they are by helping rid themselves of what they are not.

Natalie Smith is cofounder of the Lay Cistercians of South Florida under the spiritual guidance of Father Basil Pennington, O.C.S.O. She is also involved in vocation work for Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky and other Trappist and Benedictine houses in the United States.


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"Natalie Smith has imbibed the peaceful dedication of the cloister and made it available to everyone—prisoner, shut-in, laborer. This book offers to those involved in business of any kind a key to opening their lives to God's grace in the midst of their daily responsibilities."

—Brother Gerlac O'Loughlin
Vocation Director, Abbey of Gethsemani

"*Stand On Your Own Feet* offers treasures of practical wisdom and spiritual experience."

—Father Charles Cummings, O.C.S.O.
Editor, *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*


"Natalie Smith clearly details the practical and necessary spiritual path of 'Anonymous Monks.' Her 'rule of life' embraces the ordinary austerities of everyone's life and helps transform them. . . . This edifying work will contribute to the building of 'Christ's Body' in ordinary but sacred Christian daily life."

—Jonathan Montaldo, Editor,
Dialogues with Silence:
Thomas Merton's Prayers & Drawings

Stand On Your Own Feet

Finding a Contemplative Spirit
in Everyday Life

Natalie Smith


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Send all inquiries to:

Thomas More® Publishing
An RCL Company
200 East Bethany Drive
Allen, Texas 75002-3804

Telephone: 800-264-0368 / 972-390-6300
Fax: 800-688-8356 / 972-390-6560

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Customer Service E-mail: cservice@rcl-enterprises.com

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Foreword

AThe city of San Francisco honors one of its citizens with a most unusual memorial. We have all heard of memorial hospitals and memorial libraries, but how about a memorial turnaround? The Friedel Klussmann Memorial Turnaround is part of San Francisco's cable car system. It consists of a few yards of tracks, mounted on something like a giant lazy Susan embedded in the pavement of Ghirardelli Square. When it turns, it reverses the direction of the cable car standing on it from downhill to uphill. Then the car can be hitched to the cable that will pull it up the steep incline of Hyde Street to the top of Nob Hill.

As I was standing in a long line of tourists waiting to board the cable car, the idea of a "memorial turnaround" kept tickling my mind. Suddenly the thought hit me: Couldn't one call the whole Christian tradition the "Jesus Christ Memorial Turnaround"? Doesn't it go back to a turning point in his life when he broke bread with his friends and said, "Do this in remembrance of me"? Wasn't his short life a turning point in history? Didn't he turn people's minds around by the way he lived and taught? "The last shall be first, and the first last." "Let the greatest among you become as the least, and the ruler as one who serves." This is nothing less than the blueprint for a monumental turnaround in both public and private life, a call for total conversion.

"Conversion" is a word that has lost much of its bite. Today, even Christians have almost forgotten that it literally means a complete



"turnaround." The early followers of Christ, however, were well aware that their way of life ran counter to accepted standards. "When I am weak, then I am strong," Saint Paul said. But when the early fervor cooled off, and Christianity gained worldly power, a crying need for another turnaround arose. This time, it was the turn of monks to be out of step with an aging society for the sake of Christ's Good News.

Saint Benedict, who gave monastic life in the West its lasting shape, called the monk's turnaround not *conversio* (conversion), but *conversatio*, which is the Latin word for an *ever repeated* conversion. A monk was to be mindful of the example of Christ and apply the call to conversion to every detail of daily living. This became the driving force for monasticism as a counterculture able to challenge and reshape society.

Today, we need another turnaround, "to use things and love people, not love things and use people." We need another transformation of society; our very survival depends on it. More and more Christians of different denominations are turning to Saint Benedict as a teacher and guide as they tackle this task. Many of them are not monastics but "Anonymous Monks," as Natalie Smith calls them—"people of all ages and of all religious, economic, and social backgrounds who desire to live a prayerful life living and working in the modern world." Many of them are formally connected with a monastery of their choice as members of the extended monastic family. They often outnumber those living in that monastery, ten, twenty, or thirty to one, and their numbers are steadily growing—a striking phenomenon of our time, and one of the more encouraging ones. It is for these Anonymous Monks that Natalie Smith wrote *Stand On Your Own Feet*.

This is a nuts-and-bolts book. Natalie Smith applies the turnaround principle to a wide range of tasks confronting busy people in their private and professional lives. The book deals with shopping, reading, eating; with television, child-rearing, fashion, peer pressure, money, sex, sickness, and many similar challenges. The Table of Contents will give you an overview.

You will notice how often prayer is mentioned in the chapter headings. For Natalie Smith, praying means more than saying prayers. She sees prayer as a power that changes the world—the source of kinetic



energy for the turnaround. In prayer we go to that core of our being where each of us can say, "I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me." When we act from this center, everything we do becomes prayer—prayer-in-action that changes the world.

Stand On Your Own Feet is a book about basics, yet it is not for beginners only. Time and again, all of us need to go back to the basics and make a new beginning. As we practice the prayer that changes the world, we ourselves will be changed. We will discover that our conversion implies more than we realized on the basic level. We may discern social implications that go far beyond what we bargained for: "We are on a protest of sorts" (Merton).

Natalie Smith does not draw out all the implications of the turnaround. She follows accustomed patterns of Christian thought and expresses herself in accustomed language. Once you learn to stand on your own feet, however, you will sooner or later hear a call to go beyond everything to which you are accustomed. Precisely because you are grounded in tradition, you will be able to renew tradition, seeing it in a new light and expressing it in new language and initiative.

My own path has shown me this. Half a century ago, my life as a young Benedictine was close in its outward form to the life of a medieval monk. Today, I am serving Anonymous Monks in more than a hundred countries through an interactive website, www.gratefulness.org. More and more far-reaching changes are undoubtedly awaiting us. All who learn from this book to stand on their own feet can sing with conviction the famous Shaker refrain, "To turn and turn shall be our delight, till by turning and turning we come 'round right."

Brother David Steindl-Rast, O.S.B.
www.gratefulness.org