

Gelbman Ps 90 Tape

LENT PREFACE - SUNDAY

Environment has become one of the big talking-pts in the world today, the subject (in one form or another) of an increasing number of national and international conferences — we even had one here in HK not so long ago. It's a very wide subject; and in ~~all~~ its branches, it affects people. The experts that confer together and who are writing the multiplying books and articles today, come from almost every ~~branch~~ ^{field} of knowledge and science that deals with people — anthropology, sociology, psychology, medicine, architecture, economics, ... the list is interminable. Environment affects not only individuals, as such, but communities and whole peoples and nations. But human environment is more than just social structures, geography, climate, good town planning or what-have-you — a person's human experience and history, a nation's experience and history have their effects on attitudes, habits, patterns of thought and living. Fighting may have ended in the eastern states of Nigeria last month, but how many generations will it be before the scars of that civil war are healed? ... The human scars which remain long after physical damage and destruction is repaired and its traces covered over. There's a tragic and dangerous ^{naivety} ~~naivety~~ in the notion that appears sometimes, that all would be well for America + americans, Vietnam and vietnamese if only the ghastly war were quickly ended. Nations don't learn as quickly from their experiences and mistakes as many individuals may do. Political leaders and administrators have a heavy responsibility because it's people and their lives who are affected by decisions, mistakes, encouragement, inspiration and vision given and

made by them. This is why politics, in the broad sense, must be a concern of all Christians and the leaders in the Christian community. And it's a concern that cannot be divorced from prayer. For God is necessarily present in the Christian's environment, his experience and history — or sltd. I say that a Christian is aware of God's presence and action in the world of men, whether or not He is recognized and acknowledged by them. For many people, even people who call themselves Christian, prayer only becomes real, a part of life, when things go wrong, when hope and one's own abilities and efforts leave no other source of strength and trust than God. In desperation, He becomes a last refuge. There's nothing new about this experience, and God's goodness does not reject even the poorest human response to Him. Lent is a time of prayer: it's also a reminder, or sltd. be if you are at all acquainted with the O.T. or the life of Christ, of the desert and the experiences of the people of Israel and of Our Lord Himself there. The desert was and is an uncompromising ^{or falsity} place, a place of harsh reality where there's no room for half-measures. This a place literally of life and death: it was the place where God's people met their God, an experience which they cd. never forget. In the desert, there is only one choice to be made, without the luxury of remaining in the state of indecision about God which the ordinary run of life allows. Lent, leading up to Easter, sltd. be a recall to the desert experience of God's people and to the ^{irrevocability} ~~irrevocability~~ of one's personal experience of meeting God in the silence and starkness of one's choice — first response of faith. ["Salvator mundi, salva nos" — Saviour of the world, save us; a note by ~~Richard~~ John Blow

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The people of Israel didn't always live in the desert; but their nation's experience there made them, and the desert remained for them a symbol full of meaning. In early Christian spirituality, something of the same usage remained, in the lives of the first monks and hermits — even today, there is the same idea in the making of a retreat. For every Christian, there is a time in life, a month or maybe many years, when the same experience of God came to him, when he chose to be part of God's people rather than a lost wanderer without God. It is part of his Christian environment, both in the community of men and as a person. But just as the O.T., in its prophets, God's spokesmen, in its prayers and wisdom, had to keep reminding Israel of its formative experience (for the work and pleasure, the 'ordinariness' of life tended to make them forget), so we need to be reminded of our part, our experience of God. This is what the thanksgiving of the Eucharist is, only ^{even} its regularity & 'ordinariness' can lull our awareness and appreciation of what it is we do every Sunday. So Lent comes along, once a year, to help us get ready for the annual celebration of Our Lord's perch at Easter. And it's an invitation to go with Christ, led by the Spirit, once more into the desert, to be alone with Him where there's nothing to distract or to let us out of the necessity of facing the realities of life, the reality of God and His will for us. And when we pray, let us pray for all our fellow-men, especially for those who have not yet had the courage, or the real opportunity, to face the desert experience.