

22.7.76

Gloria (Mary S. Francis) It seems that there are a lot of people today who do want to pray, to learn about prayer, and contemplation, and mystical experience — and not just to learn about it but experience it for themselves. There's been a whole upsurge of searching for the spiritual in life — interest in eastern religion and mysticism, rediscovery of old traditions of prayer and contemplation, desire to learn techniques new and old. It shows in the remarkable mushrooming of groups of people who pray together, not only what are called 'charismatic groups' but many other sorts as well — and they've seemingly got stronger and deeper roots than some of the other popular movements that have swept through the Church since the early 1960s. There's also been a notable expansion of published books, articles, tapes, pictures, slides concerning prayer in one form or another, at the expense (perhaps) of the social-concerned thrust of a few years ago. Even perhaps the popularity of things like Jonathon Livingstone Seagull give evidence of peoples' longing and desire for the 'Other', for communion with God. On the tide of this searching and renewal of interest in prayer, a number of spiritual guides and gurus have come to prominence too, and are in great demand in many places: and this not only in Christian circles, or by Christian people. Quite a few of the ones who are in demand in many countries around the world, in Catholic communities, have in fact passed through or stopped over for some time here in HK these past few years. One of them remarked to me that he felt rather aroused and dazed by

his rather sudden rise to fame and the constant demands now on his energy and time. It was just, he said, that his particular field of study and of expertise had suddenly become popular and himself thrust into the limelight after many years in what seemed a long way of Christian life and work. Well, over the next few weeks or so, I should like to introduce you to a fairly recent book of Fr Yves Raguin on "Paths to Contemplation". In many ways it's quite similar to what you could find in a number of other writings of recent years and of the great Christian mystics of the past. Whether or not radio may be a good or useful instrument of spiritual guidance, as distinct from inspiration or encouragement or enlightenment, I really do not know — probably not, in fact, since the best guidance has to be personal to you and your present situation, and no two people will be exactly at the same point or stage. Yet, though it may seem difficult and possibly remote and abstract, at first especially, I think perhaps you may find some help and value in these few extracts I'll be reading for you these coming Thursdays. For music, since there has also been a revival of interest in Gregorian chant, which you might call the contemplative music of the Church, I thought to punctuate the readings from Fr Yves Raguin with some of these old prayers and psalms expressed in simple yet complex song. But today, here's something quite different, a song called "Gurn".

MUSIC
PRAYERS

If you want to start out in search of God by following the path of contemplation, don't think that you are reaching out for the unreachable. God is already waiting for you. This desire which you have to start searching for Him comes from Him. It is His call. He does not want you to know it yet, but this desire does come from Him. He has given you the longing to search for Him; He has, with His own hands, prepared food for your journey, and He has foreseen the stages of that journey. Whether He shows Himself or not is of little importance, for you will find that His attractive love has prepared everything for you, both food and shelter. Perhaps at one point or another you will recognize Him in the breaking of bread. Perhaps He will walk along part of the way with you...

You are seeking to attain your God. You wish to know Him with all the strength of your soul and to love Him with all the strength of your heart. It was the vision the saints sought before you did and whom they found.

... Many people don't seek to see God, but try to put a countenance of their own making on Him. God does not have a face. Or rather, He has only one face, the one He took when He became incarnate, and even that face was an obstacle for most of those whom He met on earth. Many seek God, but many more would seek Him if they knew how to go about it. Many have sought Him without finding Him, and some have allowed themselves to be deceived by wild and artful methods that promised them peace of soul and a very dubious illumination.... Yet is there any better teacher than Christ? His method is simple, requiring fewer exercises and more love.