



St. Mary and St. Moses Monastery

ὄνχεμῖψινι ἵτε μαῖτ ἀρροζ ἐπιἄβητ ἵτε
θνεθούαβ μαρια νεμ φηἄθούαβ μωἵςϑ

†The opening of St Mary and St Moses Abbey in Corpus Christi, Texas, has brought something fresh and vital to our diocese which previously was accessible only by flying to the monasteries on the far away sands of Egypt or California. Anyone who is familiar with life in a monastery—that is, one who has spent several days living the monastery life—will agree with the statement that it in a sense “brings a person back to himself”. It to some degree restores those human qualities which have been faded by modern city life.

†There is, above all, a return to simplicity. The person’s mind and actions are brought to a stand still.

The person has just come from a life of endless obligations, deadlines, and phone calls; but now—stillness. He may at first feel a little lost. And at that moment a chance for self-reflection appears, the first maybe to present itself in years. “Why do I feel suddenly empty?” He comes face-to-face with himself—it can be a moment of crisis. He begins to examine himself, his goals, values, meaning. But of course, the reason he has waited so long to do this is clear: he’s just too busy. For life for most of us these days is one breathless race to get no-one knows what (or why) done. And even our “vacations” are often so packed with activity that there is barely any time to sit down and reflect—which



would anyway, in the average family's thinking, be a waste of hotel time. Therefore one simply forgets the essential basics of his humanity. Man is being ever more reduced to a mere animated machine (or a very developed animal) in modern philosophical thought.

†This monastery in particular offers an excellent environment for the meditation needed to rethink one's self. A cool and serene lobby to sit and read; a delightful double-winged courtyard surrounding a large patch of grass with a fountain in the center; or maybe best of all, an enormous lake adjacent to the monastery offering fresh breezes and calm rolling waters in the evening.

†And that's mostly it. All is still and peace. This actually might be frightening for some who have grown accustomed to a quick-paced lifestyle, and they will inevitably be hit by the unbearable feeling that here there's "nothing to do". But the experience is worth a try, even if for just a few days. For when you let yourself put up with the fact that outwardly there's "nothing to do," then the mind and heart—hitherto preoccupied with the outside world—begin to turn inward. There's a whole world inside of which many of us are but barely aware. It is this inward world which impelled the monks Egypt for hundreds of years to escape the city and reside in the deserts. It wasn't for some haughty disdain of "the world" or "secular humanity," but to fully explore this "inner" universe. For there, and only there, is found peace, is found joy, is found real strength; above all, there is the meeting place with God—"the Kingdom of Heaven is within you".

†And the people of this world have almost caught on to this. Why the sudden interest in yoga, in theosophist "meditation," in all this false and distorted "Eastern" spirituality? It is because modern man has attained stunning achievements in technology and entertainment and health, yet he is still unhappy. Modern man has stuffed himself till nauseous with his knowledge and trophies (haven't we been to the moon?), yet he is still hungry. But hungry for what? It's clear now that better phones or better cars won't soothe the hunger pains; so what now? Well, they have realized that, despite all this technological fanfare, man is still a spiritual being. That's the neglected factor. So they have begun to examine the "spiritual" life; but not through Christ (it is against societal rules), but rather through karma and nirvana and yoga and drugs.

†The monastery life takes this need to go inward and properly channels it. There is for example (and this is splendid) the daily praises and liturgy that begin at 4 a.m. and run through sunrise. This might be another thing that some would find "frightening", but again, it's worth a try. The thought of being awake while the rest of the city sleeps; the feeling that you are breaking the "rules" of common living; the thrill of doing something completely out of the ordinary—these have a type of excitement to them. But most of all, the joy of joining in what Copts call the "heavenly music"—the midnight praises of monks in worship and communion with Christ is beyond words. It brings one to a state of peace and rejuvenation which few other activities can do. You must experience it; and you must go with a ready heart.

(St Mary; Pompano Beach, FL)

