

Letter

from

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To
Rosemary Goldie

My dear Rosemary.

May

~~1977~~ 1977

Poustinia House

Compton

Recently I have made an attempt at keeping a Journal, and I thought I would share some of my reflections with you, as I would never manage to share all this in every letter I write. So here goes.....

MARCH 23: In Poustinia today. Listened to a tape of one of Catherine's lunch talks (Nov.12-76). It was another explanation of 'poustinia' as a way of life. I quote: "Poustinia is a way of life, and it is true, it is a free way of life. There is nothing that you have to do once you close that door,--nothing. You don't have to knit, or to stuff envelopes, etc. If you are there 3 days, you can write letters, or not write letters; it makes no difference. You can sleep, stand on your head, it makes no difference, because you are with God."

There are certain 'works' that you can do, but it does not matter; like the hermits of old, they made baskets; they sold some, tore up the rest and started all over. It is indifferent and does not matter, you are with God.

It is a way of life;
It is a free way of life;
Just to listen to God.....

It is a relentless way of life;
there is always more.
It is not scheduled.

To live without schedule is hell for some people!--
The schedule is love. It is like a honeymoon.
Just to listen to God. It is a way of life, a free way of life;
It is like going meeting God.
The Poustinia is a way of life, and we only begin to understand it...."

MARCH 24: Eve of the Annunciation; my favourite feast; 48 years ago on that day I made my 'promises'; earlier than customary, because I was leaving for Java (former Dutch East Indies). I joined the community nearly 2 years before, on August 15, 1927.

This evening at the island chapel we sang and recited the entire Acathist Hymn from the Byzantine Missal, in preparation for tomorrow's feast. It was led by Archbishop Raya who did most of the chanting, alternating with the men in the choir. It is a very exciting, colourful, theological and prayerful hymn to Our Lady. It dates from 532 and is to the Byzantine Church what the rosary and the litanies are to the Latin Rite. "There is in the Oriental Rite Church no better prayer expressing love and veneration for Mary. All the figures under which she has been represented in the Scriptures are repeated here, not in the form of a dry enumeration, but as applied to her by the living people of the Gospel, who thus participate in the universal concert of praise to glorify the Mother of God." An idea for Maxwell perhaps? We were originally called "The Women of Nazareth" and the 25th of March is our feast day.

MARCH 27: Passion Sunday. "Third scrutiny" of Raya, a Latvian refugee, who may be received into the church at Easter: a happy way to introduce a catechumen gradually into full communion. It goes back to the early Church practice; the prayers are simple and meaningful.

MARCH 28: The French edition of POUSTINIA is out and copies have reached MH. The title is: "Poustinia, le désert au coeur des villes" A good subtitle. It is "traduit de l'américain"!

MARCH 29: Found an interesting book in the MH "exhibition corner", entitled "Shaping History Through Prayer and Fasting" by Derek Prince. It is staggering to find how many world events, wars, calamities have been affected "through the simple but powerful tools of prayer and fasting," both in the Old Testament and up to the 20th century. Also how many American presidents have called for days of prayer and fasting to prevent or stop a war or a major calamity!.....

APRIL 2: Visit from Father John Main, O.S.B., Prior of Ealing Abbey, who is also forming groups of lay people in Christian meditation and the 'prayer of the heart'. A recent weekend at Maxwell was booked beyond capacity. He is obviously meeting a need. Fr. John is in Canada at the request of the Archbishop of Montreal to discuss the possibility for a Prayer House. I showed him the island chapel and my poustinia and we had a good talk. It is interesting that his own deep interest in prayer started when for a time he was in the British diplomatic service in India, where he met a "swami" who taught him 'the prayer of the heart'; he had to visit him regularly once every week throughout his time in India and keep up a daily routine of prayer. Back in UK he became a Benedictine monk and is now at Ealing Abbey, London, where, among other things, he leads prayer groups which he forms for 6 months in a weekly session of an hour. Delighted that some of the Maxwell crew have gone to these sessions. Fr. John left soon after breakfast the next day, hoping to call in at the MH Prayer House in Ottawa on his way to Montreal.

PALM SUNDAY: After downpours early on, a clear sunny day. At 9 AM the enlarged congregation (Easter holiday visitors) gathered outside the Chapel in the Woods where cedar twigs and branches were distributed. Then they processed round the outside of the round chapel singing the 'Pueri Judaeorum',---in English of course--and waving the branches at each Hosanna. There was a stiff breeze and the branches in the high trees of the island were waving solemnly in the wind, as if joining in the Hosannas! The choir was at its best; the sermon by Archbishop Raya was moving and gripping; the congregation spontaneously clapped and sang 'God grant you many years' to the beloved Archbishop.

HOLY WEEK: The readings this week are frequently from Isaiah, for some time already a special friend, full of fire and of tenderness; it touches me each year.

'The Lord called me before I was born
from my mother's womb he pronounced my name...
and hid me in the shadow of His hand.....Is.49
and the next day:

'The Lord has given me a disciple's tongue.
So that I may know how to reply to the wearied
he provides me with speech.
Each morning he wakes me to hear,
to listen like a disciple.
The Lord God has opened my ear'.....Is.50

MAUNDY THURSDAY: A quiet, peaceful day. At 4 PM, the Eucharistic Liturgy, followed by the Paschal Supper--(we were about 140)--when a huge roasted Paschal lamb is carried in on a kind of stretcher by four of the men. It is based on the Jewish celebration and was probably the meal Christ had with His apostles just before He went to Gethsemane. During the Liturgy this PM, at a given moment all the priests renewed their vows; very impressive.

GOOD FRIDAY: Today we had two services: first the usual one at 3 PM: the Good Friday Liturgy, with the reading of the Passion and the death of Christ. Then at 8 PM there was 'the Burial of Christ Service' from the Eastern Liturgy. In front of the main altar was a kind of bier and a coffin covered with a purple and gold embroidered cloth, and, laid on top, a painting like a small Icon of the dead body of Christ. It is called the Epitaphion, or Tomb of Christ. Archbishop Raya in mitre and velvet cope intoned the ceremony. The Chapel was full to overflowing, but they made room somehow for the Bishop to circulate many times round the whole area of the chapel with a thurible, incensing the crowd and once with a bottle of scented water 'in memory of the ointment-bearing women, who came to the tomb and sprinkled myrrh and spices'---an Eastern touch! The prayers are beautiful and new (to me!). At the end, the coffin with the image of the dead Christ is carried round the Church with more singing and incense and metanias and 'kissing' of the cross and eventually the Epitaphion. Finally the latter is lifted high, and one by one we passed under it to symbolize our own passing from death to life. It was an unusual and original ceremony though it was long and exhausting--(2½ hours!). However, the meaning of it lingers in the mind like the lavish incense in our clothes!

To me that Burial Service brought the whole of Holy Week together in one long sustained entering in the Passion, the Death and the Burial of Christ, with the Resurrection just round the corner. In the Burial Service at 8 PM according to the Eastern Rite on Good Friday,--following after the Western Liturgy at 3 PM,--the alternating of Western and Eastern music and liturgy came to a peak of perfection never before achieved. The singing was constantly of high quality and the reading clear and sustained. The unfamiliar and almost festive liturgy of the burial service relieved the black gloom that, in my mind, used to hang over the Good Fridays of the past, with the long, long wait till Easter morning. The Easter Liturgy on Saturday night at 11 PM was a glorious, jubilant ceremony; full of light and joy and song.-- At some stage Raya was received into the Church.

Easter Day and Easter Monday another typical MH way of celebrating. After the festive Easter breakfast at 1 AM, the day is free until dinner time at 6 PM. Easter Monday, ditto--with Mass at 5 PM. The kitchen is open to all, to make their own snacks. Plenty of eggs, bread, butter, etc. available. A wonderful way of relaxing in a large family.

APRIL 13: My birthday. I thought I had kept it dark, but when I walked in for lunch I was greeted with a many voiced: "God grant you many years...3 x's, God grant you many, many, many years!" and a huge birthday card signed by all. That was that, I thought, and so about 9 PM I withdrew to my poustinia. I had hardly been there 5 minutes when there was a knock at the door and a couple of staff members came in with their hands full of all kinds of delicacies to have a party! By 9:30 we were about 25 and packed like sardines. It was heartwarming! At 10 PM they vanished in the dark!.....Another year gone,--or begun! whichever way one looks at it. There certainly is never a dull moment in my life here, and there never was! Alleluia!

I have meant to send this to you for weeks, but the spirit is willing, but . . . ! I thought it would interest you. Last year I went to work well for a month, and returned here in October by plane. I intend to continue a life of prayer in a better way, - as I think Fr. Theodoros would have expressed it -; to pray for the Grail everywhere. Grailmembers everywhere and for the conversion.

of the world, the original object of the Grail!
I live on a small island (20 acres) at a stone's
throw from the main house. If you are interested, I am
gladly give you more details. (I do not belong
to the M.H. Community, but am treated as one of a
family, while remaining 100% Grail.) —

How are you Rosemary? I hear that you are
the first woman "officially" in Vatican service
you have been that for years!!? Anyway, I hope
others will be allowed to follow.... it is a
time!! —

Are you in touch with Australia? Mopsy
the president, visited Worswell while I was
also the Egyptian; whose name I forgot at the
moment; but who is J.P. at the moment; she
on the way to USA, she said, to close Grail
We could hardly believe our ears, but not
judged! — Lydaine is in Holland, retired
Amsterdam; she has recently had a fairly
operation, but is back home and picking up
strength. Her address is: AMSTELVEENSE WEG
in case you haven't got it. — Amsterdam-7

How is Maria Carosi? Give her my love
my only ^{regular} contact with Rome is 'Dialogue
which Dr. Tesatti sends me faithfully and I
read it from cover to cover!!

Well Rosemary, if you have a minute to be
send me a little sign of life; and any prayer
may need for people or causes. My love as a
Yours

(as from) Piazza San Calisto, 16
00153 Roma
July 24th, 1977

Dear Yvonne,

I was very happy to get your Easter letter (and hand-written additions) last month, and to have a glimpse of your "way of life". It is good to know that you are just there "with God", and that in some way, all of those who have any link with you (and I like to be of the number) are also present in your "listening".

You will notice the "as from". I am actually staying for a week with Frances Scott in Amsterdam-Bijlmermeer (a world in itself). Her - with whom Frances shares the flat - is at a weaving course in Finland. This is, I think, the first time for years that I have travelled anywhere without a meeting to attend.

To-morrow we shall be visiting the Tiltenberg (but in a rather "marginal" way, for I believe there is a Zen course in progress), and I hope to see Lydwine before I leave, as well as Patricia. Yesterday I saw De in her "Hof", and also Ruth at the Begijnhof.

I shall be sending this from Rome and will include a circular I drafted earlier this year to explain to friends and (non-Catholic) cousins in Australia what my new situation involves. I am no longer the "first woman" in the Roman Curia!! There have, of course, been others during all these years, and there still are. But, as you will see, the reorganization of the "Laiety Council" has - temporarily, at least, eliminated the only post for a woman (or lay person) at the level of "Under-Secretary". I hope they will find other ways really involve more women responsibly, not for the sake of "power", but for the quality of "pastoral reflection" at the level of the universal Church. Pope Paul understands this - but not all his co-workers in Curia!

I had known there might be a change in my situation, for I had been ten years in the "Consilium de Laicis", but I had rather expected to stay on in some other capacity, or perhaps to go to some other Vatican office. It came as a complete surprise when I was told in December that my one course at the Lateran was to be "expanded" into a full-time "professorship" at the Pastoral Institute. This will become fully effective with the new academic year in October. It is demanding work in many ways and has to be constantly "invented", but it is well worth while, and it is a way of using whatever experience I have gathered in these many years of congresses, etc.! It is quite a different relationship to "the clergy".

I will probably have less opportunity of travelling than in the past - although you never know. I was invited last year to the Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia for the Women's Day, and found myself on a platform with Mother Teresa and Dorothy Day (a memorable experience). Australia especially is rather beyond my means. There are still people I would like to see - old friends, sisters-in-law, nieces and nephews, etc., etc., but I have no one left of my immediate family. The last of my three brothers died three years ago.

Maria Carosi sends special love. She has now retired from work. She is 72 (retiring age is 70 at the Vatican). She keeps very well. Her

mother died five years ago (aged 91), after two years of illness, which were a big strain for Maria. I was afraid Maria might have a breakdown after the mother's death, but fortunately she picked up very well.

July 29th, Rome

Back to the heat of Rome (Holland was cool and cloudy), but is rather peaceful during this holiday period.

I had a very good visit to Lydwine. Frances and I had intended staying for coffee, but the conversation continued as we ate our sandwiches and Lydwine provided abundant tea and other good things. I found her in excellent form, looking much better than when I saw her a few years ago, and full of many interests as well as that of her Spanish lessons to a very diversified "public".

At the Tiltenberg, we tiptoed through the corridor to the chapel while the Zen people were relaxing elsewhere; and we also visited the grave of Elizabeth Reid. Brigid Huizinga was there, too. She is still in Holland; but will probably come back for good, from Lescar in a couple of years time.

At Patricia's home we listened together to a recording of music from Australia, sent at the time of their celebration last March of their 40th anniversary. The "movement" is very different now, but the seeds which have been sown have given life in many unexpected ways.

The International President, Simone Tagher, is in Australia at present. She went on there, I think, from U.S.A. It does not seem that Greilville will be closed. There has been talk of it, but the Americans (or some of them) had assured Lydwine that it would not be sold, and I do not think that Simone would insist when she saw the situation at first hand.

It is a crazy world. In Rome, as elsewhere - and more so, in other ways - we have violence, political and otherwise, economic crisis, pornography and the abortion campaign (with nauseous demonstrations, involving teen-age girls)... but there are also good things happening. You will have enough to pray for. I think we should pray especially for politicians, those who are capable of becoming truly Christian statesmen(or -women!). And for our great Pope, attacked on the right and the left and suffering from his arthritis, but truly a "friend of God". In spite of rumours, I do not think he will resign, and I hope and pray that it will never come to his mind, feeling obliged to do so. In my own family, I would like a prayer for one of my sisters-in-law, who is dying gradually of multiple sclerosis and terribly frustrated.