

Book provides ample fare for journey 'home'

Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home, by Richard J. Foster, Harper Collins (San Francisco, 1992); 288 pages; \$17.

By Monsignor William H. Shannon
Guest contributor

Author of the best-selling book, *Celebration of Discipline*, copyrighted in its revised edition in 1988, Richard J. Foster, a Quaker by religious profession, has written yet another book that everyone needs to read.

This time he writes with passion about prayer. He writes, too, with a certain intimacy, giving the reader the sense of taking part in a personal conversation. In other words, he talks to you. One finishes reading this book with a warm feeling and a greater determination to rescue prayer from what may have been its peripheral place in one's life and puts it squarely at the center.

Dotted throughout with the author's personal experiences of what prayer has meant in his life, together with apt short quotations from authorities that range from the early fathers and mothers to contemporary writers, the book provides rich fare on what prayer can mean in the Christian's life.

The book has 21 chapters — each on a different form of prayer — from chapter one's simple prayer, which is the prayer of beginners, to chapter 21's radical prayer, which is prophetic prayer.

The chapters in between talk about

what readers will recognize as usual forms of prayer, such as "prayer of Adoration," "meditative prayer," "contemplative prayer," and "intercessory prayer." But there are types of prayer that normally we might not think of: "the prayer of tears," "the prayer of relinquishment," "formation prayer," "the prayer of suffering," "authoritative prayer," and others.

The author's distinction between "petitionary prayer" (prayer for one's own needs) and intercessory prayer (prayers offered for the needs of others) is helpful and clearly set forth.

Although the book offers no particular techniques of prayer, it abounds in examples of the various types of prayer discussed. Throughout the book there is the permeating thought that God is always with us and that God acts through us and with us more often than we realize. And it is the author's thesis that if we were more open to listen to God, we would be so much more frequently the instruments of God's saving, healing power.

Some may be put off by what may appear as an overly subjective approach to prayer. Thus Foster points out many instances in which people in critical situations listen for God. And the word of God not infrequently does come, perhaps in a Scripture text or in a word or words that fill their minds, and give them direction as to how they are to act.

The skeptic will be inclined to say: "How does one know whether this is

God's word or the word of our own desire. And if it is God's word, how does one know how to interpret it?" These are surely valid objections, but the skeptic has to ask himself/herself: Should I be more open to this notion of prayer? Does my suspicion of it reflect my own failure to recognize how close to us the supernatural world is and how God is so very near us that we should not be surprised if God does speak to us in important moments in our lives?

Without doubt the author is much more comfortable with unmediated access to God, though it should be pointed out that there is a chapter on sacramental prayer and an emphasis on the community's importance for growth in the life of prayer.

The book's 21 chapters divide into three main sections, each with seven chapters. Section one is about *Moving Inward* so that God's grace may bring about the transformation of heart in us that all growth in prayer requires.

Section two is prayer's *Upward Thrust*, which leads us into that personal intimacy with God that is so necessary to a healthy and deep prayer life. And finally, in section three, there is prayer's *Outward Thrust*, which moves us to share with others God's love that we have experienced.

I recommend all should read this nourishing book.

Monsignor Shannon is professor emeritus of theology at Nazareth College of Rochester.

'If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him?'

1 John III, 17

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