

# Poustinia: Encountering God in Silence, Solitude and Prayer (Madonna House Classics Vol.1)

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Poustinia -- The modern spiritual classic for those seeking the open heart and listening soul of a silent contemplation.

Poustinia, a Russian word, means 'desert', a place to meet Christ in silence, solitude and prayer. Catherine Doherty combines her insights into the great spiritual traditions of the Russian Church with her very personal experience of life with Christ.

Men and women who desire communion with God can discover how the poustinia powerfully fulfills their yearning. Readers are invited to leave the noise and hurried pace of daily life to enter a place of silence and solitude. Catherine writes from her own experience with refreshing and startling Christian authenticity and a strong personal sense of spiritual authority.

Catherine emphasizes 'poustinia of the heart,' an interiorized poustinia, a silent chamber carried always and everywhere in which to contemplate God within. Learn how our desert can be in the marketplace, in the midst of countless conferences, traffic jams, bus trips--or a hospital ward. Written by one who knows by experience, Poustinia brings consolation with its vision of a personal desert that can bloom in simple, profound prayer.

A timeless best-seller, published in 16 foreign editions around the world, the experience of poustinia has become a worldwide phenomenon following its publicity through this popular book.

Catherine de Hueck Doherty was born in Russia on August 15, 1896. Her parents, Theodore and Emma Kolyschkine, who belonged to the minor nobility, were devout members of the Orthodox Church and had their child baptized in St. Petersburg on September 15.

Schooled abroad because of her father's job, she and her family returned to St. Petersburg in 1910, where she was enrolled in the prestigious Princess Obolensky Academy. In 1912, aged 15, she made what turned out to be a disastrous marriage with her first cousin, Boris de Hueck. At the outbreak of World War I, Catherine became a Red Cross nurse at the front, experiencing the horrors of battle firsthand. On her return to St. Petersburg, she and Boris barely escaped the turmoil of the Russian Revolution with their lives, nearly starving to death as refugees in Finland. Together they made their way to England, where Catherine was received into the Catholic Church on November 27, 1919.

Emigrating to Canada with Boris, Catherine gave birth to their only child, George, in Toronto in 1921. Soon she and Boris became more and more painfully estranged from one another, as he pursued extramarital affairs. To make ends meet, Catherine took various jobs and eventually became a lecturer, travelling a circuit that took her across North America. Prosperous now, but deeply dissatisfied with a life of material comfort, her marriage in ruins, she began to feel the promptings of a deeper call through a passage that leaped to her eyes every time she opened the Scriptures: "Arise, go... sell all you possess... take up your cross and follow me." Consulting with various priests and the bishop of the diocese, she began her lay apostolate among the poor in Toronto in the early 1930's, calling it Friendship House.

Because her approach was so different from what was being done at the time, she

encountered much persecution and resistance, and Friendship House was forced to close in 1936. Catherine then went to Europe and spent a year investigating Catholic Action. On her return, she was given the chance to revive Friendship House in New York City among the poor in Harlem. After that she was invited to open another Friendship House in Chicago. In 1943, having received an annulment of her first marriage, she married Eddie Doherty, one of America's foremost reporters, who had fallen in love with her while writing a story about her apostolate.

Meanwhile, serious disagreements had arisen between the staff of Friendship House and its foundress. When these could not be resolved, Catherine and Eddie moved to Combermere, Ontario, Canada on May 17, 1947, naming their new rural apostolate Madonna House. This was to be the seedbed of an apostolate that now numbers more than 200 staff workers and over 125 associate priests, deacons, and bishops, with 22 field-houses throughout the world. Catherine Doherty died on December 14, 1985 in Combermere at the age of 89. Since then, the cause for Catherine's beatification has been officially opened.

Dan Herr, publisher of the Critic, once said, Retreats are out... deserts are in! Perhaps I am being presumptuous in thinking that his gentle little arrow was partially directed at me. But I haven't noticed too many other people on the North American continent writing about deserts or going to them.

For the last few years I have been talking and writing a great deal about silence, solitude, and deserts, and I will continue to write about them because I think they are vitally important to our growing, changing, technological, urban civilization. It is obvious that humanity is facing many problems, will have to face many more, and that these problems are deeply disturbing the souls of all men. It is just as certain that we cannot, must not, reject the new, strange, adventuresome, frightening world that is opening before us, and is already with us.

Especially we Christians cannot do this, because Christ has inserted himself into this world and we are his people, his body; and so we belong as he does to this world of computers, to this world of cybernetics, that daily brings vaster problems before our minds, hearts and souls. For science moves faster and faster, so much faster than the men of today even the men of tomorrow are able to apprehend, comprehend or assimilate.

At the same time, this world of science, together with the spiritual renewal, invites man (the center of creation) to an experience of the liberty of the children of God seldom known before. Now, man can have an encounter with reality and can truly rise to the very source to the Origin that has no origin. For the mystery of men in the midst of the world, nature, technology, and urbanization, is intrinsically a Divine Mystery.

Yet it is still on the cross that God reveals himself to this scientific, technological civilization of ours. As usual, he is both close and distant. As usual, he reveals himself through what is not himself, so that even modern man can recognize the fullness of truth the image of God manifested in the world and its temporality. But it is to be understood that this Mystery, first of all, is not found in the world as such. It is found and seized upon in the hearts of men who seek him, who don't deny his existence. It is because man is fundamentally spirit open to the

absolute of the Divine that he is always dissatisfied, in one manner or another, with all created reality. Nature is not divine. It is only a sign of God, a cry toward God.

It seems strange to say, but what can help modern man find the answers to his own mystery and the mystery of him in whose image he is created, is silence and solitude in a word, the desert. Modern man needs these things more than the hermits of old. If we are to witness to Christ in today's marketplaces where there are constant demands on our whole person we need silence. If we are to be always available, not only physically, but by empathy, sympathy, friendship, understanding, and boundless caritas, we need silence. To be able to give joyous, unflagging hospitality, not only of house and food, but of mind, heart, body and soul, we need silence. True silence is the search of man for God. True silence is a suspension bridge that a soul in love with God builds to cross the dark, frightening gullies of its own mind, the strange chasms of temptation, the depthless precipices of its own fears that impede its way to God.

True silence is the speech of lovers. For only love knows its beauty, completeness, and utter joy. True silence is a garden enclosed, where alone the soul can meet its God. It is a sealed fountain that he alone can unseal to slacken the soul's infinite thirst for him.

True silence is a key to the immense and flaming heart of God. It is the beginning of a divine courtship that will end only in the immense, creative, fruitful, loving silence of final union with the Beloved.

#### Other Books

Chicken soup for the kid's soul.

☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ . A collection of short stories, anecdotes, poems, and cartoons which present a positive outlook on life."