

Shapes for Living

Practising the presence of God

Anthony Bloom, the Russian Orthodox archbishop, describes in his book *School for Prayer** how he was asked for advice on prayer by a formidable lady who said she'd asked everyone else and they'd all failed, so maybe as he knew nothing he might blurt out something useful!

Anthony took a deep breath and suggested she went to her room after breakfast, put it straight, sat down comfortably, lit a lamp in front of her icon, and just enjoyed the room. Then she should take her knitting and for fifteen minutes she should simply 'knit before the face of God', but not say one word of prayer.

After a while she came back to him and said, 'It works!' She'd done what he suggested, and really enjoyed her room, which she hadn't really appreciated for years. Then she began to knit, and she became more and more aware of the silence and the peace and the rhythm of the knitting and ticking of the clock. 'And then I perceived that the silence was not simply an absence of noise, but that the silence had substance. It was not absence of something but presence of something. The silence had a destiny, a richness, and it began to pervade me. The silence around began to come and meet the silence within. At the heart of the silence there was him who is all stillness, all peace, all poise.'

(*From Anthony Bloom, 'School for Prayer', Darton, Longman & Todd; 3rd Revised edition edition, 1993)