**Prayer in the Tradition of John Main**

*By Lisa Rosenlund,*

John Main (1926-1982) was born and raised in London and received a Jesuit education. He was drafted into the British Army in the last year of WWII. After the war, Main entered a seminary in England, but began to doubt his vocation and left after two years. By this time, his family had moved to Dublin, so Main joined them there and studied law at Trinity College.  After being called to the Bar in London, he joined the British Foreign Service and was posted to Malaysia. He served two years before returning to Dublin to teach law at Trinity. To the surprise of even those who knew him well, Main left academia three years later to become a Benedictine monk at a London monastery.

During his posting in Malaysia, Main learned to meditate under the direction of an Indian monk.  When he entered the monastery, he continued this practice until his novice master advised him to return to more discursive forms of prayer. Contemplative prayer had long been marginalized in the Catholic Church, so he complied.  In 1970, Main was sent to Washington, D.C. to teach at a school run by the monastery.  A student asked him if there was anything comparable to meditation in the Christian mystical tradition.  Research led Main to the prayer tradition of the desert fathers and in particular the Conferences of John Cassian.

Convinced of meditation’s Christian identity, Main returned to his London monastery to establish what was to become the first Christian Meditation Center. He then established a Benedictine Priory in Montreal devoted to Christian meditation.

Main had a very particular, but simple technique for meditating, which he believed should be done for twenty to thirty minutes in the morning and evening.  To meditate you should be seated with your back straight, eyes closed, relaxed but alert. Breathing normally, you begin to repeat, silently, interiorly, a single word or short phrase – a “mantra.” The word recommended is “Maranatha.” Maranatha is Aramaic for “Come, Lord,” as in 1 Corinthians 16:22 and Revelation 22:20.  Say your mantra gently and continuously, returning to it when you become distracted.

For Main, meditation was a way of life, but it did not replace other forms of prayer. He warned that meditation is simple, but not easy, and those who practice it should not measure their progress day by day. Rather, they should be alert to the changes in their relationships through the slow release of love.

If you are interested in praying in the tradition of John Main, there are YouTube videos online to get you started. There are also John Main Christian Meditation Groups in San Francisco, one of which is at St. Dominic’s Church. For more information, visit *www.christianmeditation.us*. For those interested in another type of contemplative prayer, the last session of St. Hilary’s “Centering Prayer Workship” will be held on Tuesday, November 9 from 7:00-8:00 p.m. in Tarantino Hall.