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Crossing
Reclaiming the Landscape of our Lives (New Edition)
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The TV documentary series 'The Monastery', recording the experiences of five men who made an extended retreat at Worth abbey in 2004, aroused wide interest and made many people ask what monasticism had to say to the world today. It is still a common view that monks and nuns shut themselves up to escape from the pressures and responsibilities of real life. In response to the widespread interest in The Monastery Mark Barrett, a monk of Worth who was himself involved in the programme, has produced the second edition of Crossing. He shows that, far from being an escape from reality, the monastic way as described in the Rule of St Benedict, our seeking God, means discovering who we are and living to the full. "We do not meet God in the abstract."

In five chapters which follow the pattern of the Daily Office Dom Mark shows that "monastic spirituality, which could otherwise appear distant to those who do not live behind monastery walls" is "a spirituality relevant to anyone who has to cope with a pattern of repeated experiences." He provides "a series of reflections on finding the presence of God in aspects of our regular experience, a process which ... may assist the seeker in mapping the paths of his or her own life." Whether by acknowledging a reluctance to pray or to face the coming day (Vigils), or our need to "let go" and face the fact of death (Compline), we are invited to be honest about ourselves. The reflections on the labyrinth - life going round in circles so that we keep finding ourselves back where we were - (Midday Prayer), on lectio divina (Vespers) and on relationships (Compline), I found particularly helpful. This is a book to be read more than once. Illustrations from the writer's experience and reading abound. There are treasures there and I want to go back and savour many pages again. Monastic spirituality is about responding to God in terms of what he has made us - fully human - and our need to travel with others.

Reginald SSF