

BROTHER LAWRENCE RESURRECTION

THE PRACTICE OF THE
PRESENCE OF GOD

**Lawrence Lawrence of
the Resurrection Brother
The Practice of the
Presence of God**

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The Practice of the Presence of God:*

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Brother Lawrence

The Practice of the Presence of God

Editor's Preface

Brother Lawrence was born Nicholas Herman around 1610 in Herimenil, Lorraine, a Duchy of France. His birth records were destroyed in a fire at his parish church during the Thirty Years War, a war in which he fought as a young soldier. It was also the war in which he sustained a near fatal injury to his sciatic nerve. The injury left him quite crippled and in chronic pain for the rest of his life.

The details of his early life are few and sketchy. However, we know he was educated both at home and by his parish priest whose first name was Lawrence and who was greatly admired by the young Nicolas. He was well read and, from an early age, drawn to a spiritual life of faith and love for God.

We also know that in the years between the abrupt end of his duties as a soldier and his entry into monastic life, he spent a period of time in the wilderness living like one of the early desert fathers. Also, prior to entering the monastery, and perhaps as preparation, he spent time as a civil servant. In his characteristic,

self deprecating way, he mentions that he was a "footman who was clumsy and broke everything".

At mid-life he entered a newly established monastery in Paris where he became the cook for the community which grew to over one hundred members. After fifteen years, his duties were shifted to the sandal repair shop but, even then, he often returned to the busy kitchen to help out.

In times as troubled as today, Brother Lawrence, discovered, then followed, a pure and uncomplicated way to walk continually in God's presence. For some forty years, he lived and walked with Our Father at his side. Yet, through his own words, we learn that Brother Lawrence's first ten years were full of severe trials and challenges.

A gentle man of joyful spirit, Brother Lawrence shunned attention and the limelight, knowing that outside distraction "spoils all". It was not until after his death that a few of his letters were collected. Joseph de Beaufort, representative and counsel to the local archbishop, first published the letters in a small pamphlet. The following year, in a second publication which he titled, 'The Practice of the Presence of God', de Beaufort included, as introductory material, the content of four conversations he had with Brother Lawrence.

In this small book, through letters and conversations, Brother Lawrence simply and beautifully explains how to continually walk with God – not from the head but from the heart. Brother Lawrence left the gift of a way of life available to anyone who

seeks to know God's peace and presence; that anyone, regardless of age or circumstance, can practice -anywhere, anytime. Brother Lawrence also left the gift of a direct approach to living in God's presence that is as practical today as it was three hundred years ago.

Brother Lawrence died in 1691, having practiced God's presence for over forty years. His quiet death was much like his monastic life where each day and each hour was a new beginning and a fresh commitment to love God with all his heart.

Edited by Lightheart at PracticeGodsPresence.com October 2002

CONVERSATIONS

Introduction: At the time of de Beaufort's interviews, Brother Lawrence was in his late fifties. Joseph de Beaufort later commented that the crippled brother, who was then in charge of the upkeep of over one hundred pairs of sandals, was "rough in appearance but gentle in grace".

First Conversation: The first time I saw Brother Lawrence was upon the 3rd of August, 1666. He told me that God had done him a singular favor in his conversion at the age of eighteen. During that winter, upon seeing a tree stripped of its leaves and considering that within a little time the leaves would be renewed and after that the flowers and fruit appear, Brother Lawrence received a high view of the Providence and Power of God which has never since been effaced from his soul. This view had perfectly set him loose from the world and kindled in him such a love for God, that he could not tell whether it had increased in the forty years that he had lived since.

Brother Lawrence said he had been footman to M. Fieubert, the treasurer, and that he was a great awkward fellow who broke everything. He finally decided to enter a monastery thinking that he would there be made to smart for his awkwardness and the faults he would commit, and so he would sacrifice his life with its pleasures to God. But Brother Lawrence said that God had surprised him because he met with nothing but satisfaction in

that state.

Brother Lawrence related that we should establish ourselves in a sense of God's Presence by continually conversing with Him. It was a shameful thing to quit His conversation to think of trifles and fooleries. We should feed and nourish our souls with high notions of God which would yield us great joy in being devoted to Him.

He said we ought to quicken and enliven our faith. It was lamentable we had so little. Instead of taking faith for the rule of their conduct, men amused themselves with trivial devotions which changed daily. He said that faith was sufficient to bring us to a high degree of perfection. We ought to give ourselves up to God with regard both to things temporal and spiritual and seek our satisfaction only in the fulfilling of His will. Whether God led us by suffering or by consolation all would be equal to a soul truly resigned.

He said we need fidelity in those disruptions in the ebb and flow of prayer when God tries our love to Him. This was the time for a complete act of resignation, whereof one act alone could greatly promote our spiritual advancement.

He said that as far as the miseries and sins he heard of daily in the world, he was so far from wondering at them, that, on the contrary, he was surprised there were not more considering the malice sinners were capable of. For his part, he prayed for them. But knowing that God could remedy the mischief they did when He pleased, he gave himself no further trouble.

Brother Lawrence said to arrive at such resignation as God requires, we should carefully watch over all the passions that mingle in spiritual as well as temporal things. God would give light concerning those passions to those who truly desire to serve Him.

At the end of this first conversation Brother Lawrence said that if my purpose for the visit was to sincerely discuss how to serve God, I might come to him as often as I pleased and without any fear of being troublesome. If this was not the case, then I ought visit him no more.

Second Conversation: Brother Lawrence told me he had always been governed by love without selfish views. Since he resolved to make the love of God the end of all his actions, he had found reasons to be well satisfied with his method. He was pleased when he could take up a straw from the ground for the love of God, seeking Him only, and nothing else, not even His gifts.

He said he had been long troubled in mind from a certain belief that he should be damned. All the men in the world could not have persuaded him to the contrary. This trouble of mind had lasted four years during which time he had suffered much.

Finally he reasoned: I did not engage in a religious life but for the love of God. I have endeavored to act only for Him. Whatever becomes of me, whether I be lost or saved, I will always continue to act purely for the love of God. I shall have this good at least that till death I shall have done all that is in me to love Him. From

that time on Brother Lawrence lived his life in perfect liberty and continual joy. He placed his sins between himself and God to tell Him that he did not deserve His favors yet God still continued to bestow them in abundance.

Brother Lawrence said that in order to form a habit of conversing with God continually and referring all we do to Him, we must at first apply to Him with some diligence. Then, after a little care, we would find His love inwardly excite us to it without any difficulty.

He expected after the pleasant days God had given him, he would have his turn of pain and suffering. Yet he was not uneasy about it. Knowing that, since he could do nothing of himself, God would not fail to give him the strength to bear them.

When an occasion of practicing some virtue was offered, he addressed himself to God saying, "Lord, I cannot do this unless Thou enablest me". And then he received strength more than sufficient. When he had failed in his duty, he only confessed his fault saying to God, "I shall never do otherwise, if You leave me to myself. It is You who must hinder my falling and mend what is amiss." Then, after this, he gave himself no further uneasiness about it.

Brother Lawrence said we ought to act with God in the greatest simplicity, speaking to Him frankly and plainly, and imploring His assistance in our affairs just as they happen. God never failed to grant it, as Brother Lawrence had often experienced.

He said he had been lately sent into Burgundy to buy the provision of wine for the community. This was a very unwelcome task for him because he had no turn for business and because he was lame and could not go about the boat but by rolling himself over the casks. Yet he gave himself no uneasiness about it, nor about the purchase of the wine. He said to God, it was His business he was about, and that he afterwards found it very well performed. He mentioned that it had turned out the same way the year before when he was sent to Auvergne.

So, likewise, in his business in the kitchen (to which he had naturally a great aversion), having accustomed himself to do everything there for the love of God and asking for His grace to do his work well, he had found everything easy during the fifteen years that he had been employed there. He was very pleased with the post he was now in. Yet he was as ready to quit that as the former, since he tried to please God by doing little things for the love of Him in any work he did. With him the set times of prayer were not different from other times. He retired to pray according to the directions of his superior, but he did not need such retirement nor ask for it because his greatest business did not divert him from God.

Since he knew his obligation to love God in all things, and as he endeavored to do so, he had no need of a director to advise him, but he greatly needed a confessor to absolve him. He said he was very sensible of his faults but not discouraged by them. He confessed them to God and made no excuses. Then, he peaceably

resumed his usual practice of love and adoration.

In his trouble of mind, Brother Lawrence had consulted no one. Knowing only by the light of faith that God was present, he contented himself with directing all his actions to Him. He did everything with a desire to please Him and let what would come of it.

He said that useless thoughts spoil all – that the mischief began there. We ought to reject them as soon as we perceived their impertinence and return to our communion with God. In the beginning he had often passed his time appointed for prayer in rejecting wandering thoughts and falling right back into them. He could never regulate his devotion by certain methods as some do. Nevertheless, at first he had meditated for some time, but afterwards that went off in a manner that he could give no account of. Brother Lawrence emphasized that all bodily mortifications and other exercises are useless unless they serve to arrive at the union with God by love. He had well considered this. He found that the shortest way to go straight to God was by a continual exercise of love and doing all things for His sake.

He noted that there was a great difference between the acts of the intellect and those of the will. Acts of the intellect were comparatively of little value. Acts of the will were all important. Our only business was to love and delight ourselves in God. All possible kinds of mortification, if they were void of the love of God, could not efface a single sin. Instead, we ought, without anxiety, to expect the pardon of our sins from the blood of Jesus

Christ only endeavoring to love Him with all our hearts. And he noted that God seemed to have granted the greatest favors to the greatest sinners as more signal monuments of His mercy.

Brother Lawrence said the greatest pains or pleasures of this world were not to be compared with what he had experienced of both kinds in a spiritual state. As a result he feared nothing, desiring only one thing of God – that he might not offend Him. He said he carried no guilt. "When I fail in my duty, I readily acknowledge it, saying, I am used to do so. I shall never do otherwise if I am left to myself. If I fail not, then I give God thanks acknowledging that it comes from Him."

Third Conversation: Brother Lawrence told me that the foundation of the spiritual life in him had been a high notion and esteem of God in faith. When he had once well established his faith he had no other care but to reject every other thought so he might perform all his actions for the love of God. He said when sometimes he had not thought of God for a good while he did not disquiet himself for it. Having acknowledged his wretchedness to God, he simply returned to Him with so much the greater trust in Him.

He said the trust we put in God honors Him much and draws down great graces. Also, that it was impossible not only that God should deceive but that He should long let a soul suffer which is perfectly resigned to Him and resolved to endure everything for His sake.

Brother Lawrence often experienced the ready succors of

Divine Grace. And because of his experience of grace, when he had business to do, he did not think of it beforehand. When it was time to do it, he found in God, as in a clear mirror, all that was fit for him to do. When outward business diverted him a little from the thought of God a fresh remembrance coming from God invested his soul and so inflamed and transported him that it was difficult for him to contain himself. He said he was more united to God in his outward employments than when he left them for devotion in retirement.

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