



Section Four from *Practicing the Presence: Conversations with Brother Lawrence* (Nicolas Herman 1605–91) Compiled by Father Joseph de Beaufort ISBN 978-1-4357-2022-0 2008 JP O'Neill

Introduction

Brother Lawrence was born Nicholas Herman around 1614 in France. He fought as a soldier in the Thirty Years War, and sustained a near fatal injury at the battle of Rambervillers in 1635. The injury left him lame and in chronic pain for the rest of his life.

After returning home from the war he retreated to the woods and became a hermit for a short time. He then worked as a valet for a powerful banker in Paris.

In 1640, when he was 26 years old, he entered a Carmelite monastery outside of Paris where he stayed for the next half-a-century, working in the kitchen and doing sandal repair.

In 1642 Nicholas Herman took his vows and became known as Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection.

Brother Lawrence died in 1691. After his death a few of his letters were collected by Joseph de Beaufort, who published them in a small pamphlet.

The following year, de Beaufort published a booklet he titled *The Practice of the Presence of God*. He included, as introductory material, the content of four conversations he had with Brother Lawrence.

Fourth Conversation



He talked with me very frequently, and with great openness of heart concerning his manner of going to God.

He told me that it mainly consists of a vigorous renunciation of everything which he sensed leads way from God.

That we might accustom ourselves to a continual conversation with Him, with freedom and in simplicity.

That we need only to recognize God intimately present with us, to address ourselves to Him every moment.

That we may ask His guidance in knowing His will when we are in doubt, and for assistance in rightly performing those things which we plainly see He requires of us. Offering them to Him before we do them, and giving Him thanks when we have finished them.

Practicing the Presence

That in this conversation with God, we are also employed in praising, adoring and loving Him incessantly, for His infinite goodness and perfection.

That, without being discouraged on account of our shortcomings, we should pray for His grace with a perfect confidence.

That God never failed to give him His grace; unless his thoughts had wandered from a sense of God's Presence, or he had forgotten to ask His assistance.

That God always gives us light in our darkness when we had no other design but to please Him.

That our sanctification did not depend upon changing our works, but in doing them for God's sake, instead of for our own. That it was lamentable to see how many people mistook the means for the end, addicting themselves to certain practices.

That the most excellent method he had found of going to God was of doing our common business without any view of impressing anyone, but (as far as we are capable) purely for the love of God.

That it was a great delusion to think that the times of prayer ought to differ from other times.

That we are as strictly obliged to adhere to God by action in the time of action, as by prayer in the season of prayer.

That his prayer was nothing but a sense of the presence of God, his soul being at that time insensible to anything but Divine love.

That when the appointed times of prayer were past, he found no difference, because he still continued with God, praising and blessing Him with all his might, so that he passed his life in continual joy.

That we ought, once and for all, heartily put our whole trust in God, and make a total surrender of ourselves to Him, secure that He would not deceive us.

That we ought not to be weary of doing little things for the love of God, who regards not the greatness of the work, but the love with which it is performed.

That we should not wonder if, in the beginning, we often failed in our endeavors.

That at last we should gain a habit, which will automatically produce its effects in us, to our exceedingly great delight.

That the whole substance of religion was faith, hope and love; by the practice of which we become united to the will of God.

That all else besides is unimportant, and to be used only as a means to arrive at our end of being merged with faith and love.

Practicing the Presence

That all things are possible to him who believes; that they are less difficult to him who hopes; that they are easier still for him who loves, and easiest of all for him who practices all three virtues.

That the end we ought to direct ourselves towards is to become, in this life, the most perfect worshippers of God we can possibly be.

That when we enter upon the spiritual life, we should consider, and examine to the bottom, what we are.

That the greater the perfection a soul aspires towards, the more dependent it is upon Divine grace.

That since first coming to the monastery, he had considered God as the end of all his thoughts and desires; as the goal to which they should lead, and in which they should terminate.

That in the beginning of his noviciate he spent the hours appointed for private prayer in thinking of God, so as to convince his mind of, and to impress deeply upon his heart, the Divine existence.

That he did this by means of devout feelings, and submission to the light of faith, rather than by studied reasonings and elaborate meditations.

That by this short and sure method he immersed himself in the knowledge and love of God; firmly resolving to live in a continual sense of His Presence, and if possible, never to forget Him again.

That when he had by prayer experienced great sentiments of that infinite Being, he went to the kitchen (for he was a cook); having first considered the actions his job required, and when and how each thing was to be done.



That he spent all the intervals of his time at work, as well as before and after his work, in prayer.

That when he began his work, he said to God, with a filial trust in Him, "O my God, since You are with me, and I must now in obedience to Your commands, apply my mind to these outward things, I ask that You grant me the grace to continue in Your Presence; and prosper me with Your assistance; receive all my works, and possess all my affections."

And he proceeded with his work, continuing his familiar conversation with his Maker -- beseeching His grace, and offering to Him all his actions.

When he had finished, he examined how he had discharged his duty; if he found everything well, he returned thanks to God; if otherwise he asked pardon; and without being discouraged, he set his mind at ease, and continued his exercise of the presence of God, as if he had never deviated from it.

"Thus," he said, "by rising after my falls, and by frequently renewed acts of faith and love, I am come to a state wherein it would be as difficult for me *not* to think of God as it was at first to accustom myself to it."

Practicing the Presence

As Brother Lawrence had found such an advantage in walking in the presence of God, it was natural for him to recommend it earnestly to others, but his example was a stronger inducement than any arguments he could propose.

His very countenance was edifying, such a loving and serene devotion appearing in it as could not but affect others. And it was observed that in the greatest hurry of business he still preserved his communion with God. He was never hasty nor loitering, but did each thing in its season, with an even, uninterrupted composure and tranquility of spirit.

"The time of business," he said, "does not for me differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen."

