

Practicing the Presence:
Conversations with
Brother Lawrence
(1614-1691)

Practicing the Presence

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INTRODUCTION



rother 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.

Practicing the Presence

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.

Practicing the Presence

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.

This book contains an abridged and edited version of those conversations. I have separated Brother Lawrence's comments, in order to facilitate in-depth study and meditation.

The truth is indeed timeless.

Gloria in Excelsis Deo

JP O'Neill



Practicing the Presence

CONVERSATIONS WITH BROTHER LAWRENCE

FIRST CONVERSATION



he first time I saw Brother Lawrence, was upon the 3rd of August, 1666. He told me that God had done him a singular favor at the age of eighteen.

Practicing the Presence

During that winter, seeing a tree stripped of its leaves, he realized that within a little time the leaves would be renewed, followed by blossoms and fruit, and he experienced such an awesome revelation regarding the Abundance and Power of God that it has never been erased from his soul.

That this realization had completely set him loose from the world, and kindled in him such a love for God, that he could not tell whether it had increased during the more than forty years he had lived since.

Practicing the Presence

That he had been a valet to M. Fieubert, the treasurer, and that he (Brother Lawrence) was a great awkward fellow who broke everything.

That he had desired to enter a monastery, although he was afraid that he would suffer for his awkwardness and any faults he should commit, and so he decided to sacrifice to God his life, with all its pleasures: but God had fooled him, for he had met with nothing but happiness in that state of surrender.

Practicing the Presence

That we should establish ourselves in a sense of God's Presence, by continually conversing with Him. That it was a shameful thing to quit this conversation; to think of trifles and foolishness.

That we should feed and nourish our souls with elevated thoughts of God; which would yield to us great joy in being devoted to Him.

Practicing the Presence

That we ought to quicken, to enliven, our faith. That it was lamentable we had so little of it; and that instead of taking faith as the guide for their conduct, men amused themselves with trivial devotions.

That the way of faith was the spirit of the Church, and that it was sufficient to bring us to a high degree of perfection.

Practicing the Presence

That we ought to give ourselves up to God with regard to both temporal and spiritual concerns, and seek our satisfaction only in the fulfilling of His will. That whether he lead us by suffering or by consolation, both would appear alike to a soul truly surrendered.



Practicing the Presence

That he was far from wondering at the misery he heard of daily in the world. On the contrary, he was surprised that there was not more, considering the malice people were capable of. He prayed for them, but knowing that God could remedy the mischief they did when He pleased, he gave himself no further trouble.

That to arrive at such acceptance as God requires, we should watch attentively over the passions which intrude into spiritual things, as well as in those of a grosser nature; that God would give light concerning these passions to those who truly desire to serve Him.

Practicing the Presence

SECOND CONVERSATION



hat he had always been governed by love, without selfish views; and that having resolved to make the love of God the end of all his actions, he had found reasons to be well satisfied with his method.

Practicing the Presence

That he was pleased when he could pick up a straw from the ground for the love of God, seeking Him only, and nothing else, not even His gifts.

Practicing the Presence

That he had long been troubled in mind about a certain belief that he should be damned, and that all the men in the world could not have persuaded him to the contrary.

That he had thus reasoned with himself about it: I have engaged in a religious life only for the love of God, and 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 done *this* good at least, that until my death I shall have done all that is in me to love Him.

Practicing the Presence

That this mental anguish had lasted four years; during which time he had suffered much, but at last he had seen that his trouble arose from lack of faith; and since realizing this he had passed his life in perfect liberty and continual joy.

That he had placed his sins between himself and God; to tell Him that he did not deserve His favors, but that God still continued to bestow them in abundance.

Practicing the Presence

That in order to form a habit of conversing with God continually, and referring all we do to Him, we must at first seek Him with some diligence: but that after a little care we should find that His love inwardly draws us to Him without any difficulty.

Practicing the Presence

That when an occasion for practicing some virtue was offered, he addressed himself to God, saying, "LORD, I cannot do this unless You enable me:" and that then he received strength more than sufficient.

That when he had failed in his duty, he confessed his fault, saying to God, I shall never do otherwise, if You leave me to myself; it is You who must hinder my failures and mend what is amiss. That after this, he felt no further uneasiness about it.

Practicing the Presence

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

Practicing the Presence

That he had been lately sent into Burgundy, to buy provisions of wine, which was a very unwelcome task for him, because he had no head for business, and because he was lame and could only move about the boat by rolling himself over the casks.

That, however, he permitted himself no uneasiness about it, nor about the purchase of the wine. That he said to God, It was His business he was about, and that he afterwards found it very well performed.

Practicing the Presence

So, likewise, his job in the kitchen (to which he had a great aversion), where he accustomed himself to doing everything for the love of God, and with prayer upon all occasions, and he had found everything easy, during the fifteen years that he had been employed there.

That he was very well pleased with the post he was now in, but that he was just as ready to quit it. That he was always pleased in *any* situation, through doing little things for the love of God.

Practicing the Presence

That with him the set times of prayer were not different from other times. That he retired to pray, according to the directions of his Superior, but that he did not want such retirement, nor ask for it, because nothing distracted him from God.

Practicing the Presence

That as he knew his obligation to love God in all things, and endeavored to do so, he had no need of a director to advise him.

Practicing the Presence

That he was very aware of his faults, but not discouraged by them; that he confessed them to God, but did not plead with Him to excuse them. When he had finished, he peaceably resumed his usual practice of love and adoration.

That when he was troubled in his mind, he consulted no one, but knowing by the light of faith that God was present, he contented himself with directing all his actions to Him. Doing everything with a desire to please Him, come of it what may.

Practicing the Presence

That useless thoughts spoil all: that mischief begins there. That we ought to reject them as soon as we perceive their irrelevance to the matter at hand, or our salvation, and return to our communion with God.

Practicing the Presence

That at the beginning he had often passed his appointed time for prayer in rejecting wandering thoughts, and then falling back into them. That he could never regulate his devotion by the methods used by others.

That all physical mortifications and other such exercises are useless, except as they served to arrive at a union with God by love.

Practicing the Presence

That he had thought often about this, and had found that the shortest route to God was to go straight to Him by a continual exercise of love, and doing all things for His sake.

Practicing the Presence

That we ought to discern a great difference between the acts of the intellect and those of the heart. That the first were of comparatively little value, but the latter acts were all.

That our only business was to love and delight ourselves in God.

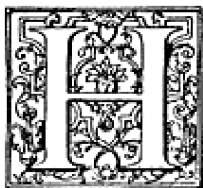
Practicing the Presence

That the greatest pains or pleasures of this world were not to be compared with what he had experienced of both in a spiritual state. That he was needful of nothing and feared nothing, desiring only one thing of God, that he might not offend Him.

That when he failed in some manner, he readily acknowledged it, saying, I am used to falling short: I shall never do otherwise if I am left to myself. If I do not fail, then I give thanks to God, acknowledging that my strength comes from Him.

Practicing the Presence

THIRD CONVERSATION



He told me that the foundation of his spiritual life had been a high ideal and esteem of God in faith. That when he had once conceived it, he had no other care but to faithfully reject every other thought, that he might perform all his actions for the love of God.

Practicing the Presence

That when sometimes he had not thought of God for a good while, he did not berate himself for it, but after having acknowledged his mistake to God, he returned to Him with so much the greater trust in Him.

Practicing the Presence

That the trust we put in God, honors Him much, and draws down great graces.

That it was impossible that God should deceive, or that He should let a soul suffer for long which is perfectly surrendered to Him, and resolved to endure everything for His sake.

Practicing the Presence

That he had often experienced the ready comforts of Divine Grace upon all occasions.

That when he had business to do, he did not think of it beforehand; but when it was time to do it he found in God, as in a clear mirror, all that was required for him to do.

That when outward business diverted him a little from the thought of God, a fresh remembrance sent from God permeated his soul, and so inflamed and transported him that it was difficult for him to contain himself.

Practicing the Presence

That he was more united to God in his everyday actions, than when he left them for traditional forms of devotion.

Practicing the Presence

That he had no occasion to consult with anybody else about his blessed state. That when he had attempted to do so, he had always come away more puzzled than before, and that as he was conscious of his readiness to lay down his life for the love of God, he had no fear of danger.

Practicing the Presence

That perfect surrender to God was a sure way to heaven, a way in which we always have sufficient light for our conduct.

Practicing the Presence

That in the beginning of the spiritual life, we ought to be faithful in doing our duty and denying ourselves; but after that, ineffable pleasures followed.

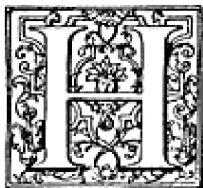
That many do not advance on the spiritual path because they stick to penances, and particular exercises and other *means*, while they neglect the love of God, which is the *end*. That this appeared plainly in their works, and was the reason why we see so little solid virtue.

Practicing the Presence

That there is needed neither art nor science for going to God, but only a heart resolutely determined to apply itself to nothing but Him, for His sake, and to love Him only.

Practicing the Presence

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.

Practicing the Presence

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.

Practicing the Presence

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.

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

Practicing the Presence

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.

Practicing the Presence

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

Practicing the Presence

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.

Practicing the Presence

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.

Practicing the Presence

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.

Practicing the Presence

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.

Practicing the Presence

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.

Practicing the Presence

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.

Practicing the Presence

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.

Practicing the Presence

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.

Practicing the Presence

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.

Practicing the Presence

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.

Practicing the Presence

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.

Practicing the Presence

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.

Practicing the Presence

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.

Practicing the Presence

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."

Practicing the Presence

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.

Practicing the Presence

"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.

Practicing the Presence

His very countenance was edifying, such a loving and serene devotion appearing in it as could not but effect 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.

Practicing the Presence

"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, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great a tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament."

Gloria in excelsis Deo



Practicing the Presence