

ON PRACTICING THE PRESENCE OF GOD

In studying the teachings of Brother Lawrence, concerning our **Practicing the Presence of God**, we have considered the following:

- The Spiritual Maxims (see Parts 5,6,7,8)
- Practices Necessary to Acquire the Spiritual Life (see Parts 9, 10, 11)
- The Union of the Soul With God (Part 12)

We now continue to apply our lives to Brother Lawrence's teachings as we seek a greater awareness of the presence of God in our lives.

We will find that these seem relatively easy for us in comparison to some of the rigors we've faced previously. We will also find that we've discussed much of this in other terms, making this a much easier reading.

Nevertheless, it is important that we can now slowly reflect on these teachings, and, as it were, position ourselves within these teachings. To what level of joy have we allowed ourselves to experience the presence of God? Have we found ourselves aware of the Presence of God in similar moments? Were we at peace with them?

On Practicing the Presence of God

FIRST: *Practicing the presence of God is the application of our spirit to God; it is the vivid recollection that God is present with us. It can be accomplished either through the imagination or by the understanding.*

SECOND: *I know a person who for forty years has practiced the conscious presence of God. To this practice he gives several other names: sometimes he calls it a simple action, a clear and distinct knowledge of God. Sometimes he refers to it as a blurred, indistinct sight, a general and loving gaze at God, or simply the remembrance of God. At all times he calls it attention to God, a silent conversation with God, confidence in God, or the life and peace of the soul. In short, this person has told me that all these types of the presence of God are only different ways of saying the same thing, and that the presence of God is now so natural that it has become a part of him. Here is how it happened:*

THIRD: *Through choosing in his will to frequently recall his spirit into the presence of God, the habit of doing this has been formed in him in such a way that as soon as his mind is free from its outward*

duties, and frequently even when he is the busiest with them, the uppermost part of his spirit or the highest part of his soul lifts itself without any diligence on his part, and remains as if it were suspended and firmly held on God, above and beyond all things, as if it were in its center and its place of rest. It is by faith that he almost always feels himself in this suspension, and that is sufficient for him. This is what he calls the state of being actually present with God, so that he now lives as if there were only God and himself in the world. He

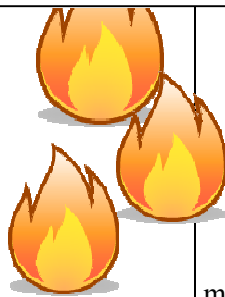


converses with God no matter where he goes, asking for what he needs and unceasing delighting himself in Him in countless ways.

GOD FIRST

Year Two, Part 14

The Prayer of Awareness



The practices that we individually established in our lives that recall the presence of God for us, are really what is discussed in the above-three practices.

Our simple acknowledgements of God in our lives in "Thanks for your presence, Lord", or "How powerful you are, O God", as we discussed early on (see parts 2,3,4) hopefully have moved us into an habitual desire to see God more and more in life, and most importantly, to acknowledge the presence of God in our own lives.

As Brother Lawrence says, "He converses with God no matter where he goes..." Our prayers of blessing, praise, adoration, petition, intercession, and thanksgiving, should flow directly from this conversation. (see Parts 9 and 10)

Whether it be through imagination (since we cannot see God), or by understanding, which grows in union with our desire for the presence of God, or by our remembrance of God, or as a loving gaze, it is attention to God. Notice Brother Lawrence in the second practice, calls these encounters with the presence of God silent conversations, confidence, or life and peace of the soul.

We are reaching into the depths of our beings even as we are living in the moment in the world. When we experience the life and peace in the heart, a human emotion is guiding us even as we seek the greater spiritual union. The silent conversation doesn't need words. And how awesome is the assurance we can have to do God's will when we realize the confidence in God we have obtained.

Notice, all of these are acts of the will, us accepting the grace of God into our lives time and again. We

are, through the gift of grace, positioning ourselves to allow God to assume more and more control as we move from ourselves to placing God above all else.



FOURTH: *However, it is fitting to repeat that this conversation with God is done in the depth and at the center of the soul. It is there that the soul speaks to God, heart to heart, always delighting itself in God in a state of great and profound peace. All that happens outside seems to the soul like only a small fire that is extinguished as quickly as it is lit, with the result that outward things succeed to a very little degree or almost never in troubling its inner peace.*

FIFTH: *To come back to our discussion of the presence of God, I maintain that this gentle and loving gaze upon God lights a divine fire in the soul without our being aware of it, and this fire burns so ardently with the love of God that we find ourselves obliged to do a number of outward things in order to moderate it.*

SIXTH: *We would be quite surprised if we knew what the soul sometimes says to God, who seems to take such great pleasure in these conversations that He permits the soul complete freedom, provided that it wishes to remain always with Him and rely on Him. And, as though He were afraid that the soul might return to created things, God takes care to supply it so well with all that it can desire that over and over it finds deep within itself a source of nourishment that is very savory and delicious to its taste, although it never desired it or procured it in any way, and without its having contributed anything on its part other than its consent.*

SEVENTH: *We can conclude that the practice of the presence of God is the life and nourishment of the soul and that it can be obtained with the grace of the Lord.*

Again, we are being shown how, if we truly desire the presence of God in our lives, if we willfully choose to grow in union with our God, it all takes place from the moment a choice for God is made. What we must remember is what Brother Lawrence reminds us of — that God knows what is at the heart, the core of our being — the soul. This is a strong reminder that our choosing to desire the presence of God, and to live in union with him, the commitment must grow with us. It cannot be simply when

we choose to do so.

Yes, there will be times in our lives when we struggle with past sins or the way in which we have previously lived our lives, but these are usually always before us. We confront these with purpose to change them and us. And when they reoccur, we find ourselves immediately knowing the grace of God still present. Instantaneously, in the depths of our soul, we realize that this is not what we are about. It is, indeed humbling, as we must acknowledge our sinfulness. But God provides the grace for this immediately. Yes, with a true heart seeking perfected union with God, we are finding God is enabling that union to be strengthened through our weaknesses.

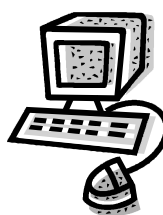
And we immediately return to again willing God's will (presence) in our lives. We immediately again open ourselves to how God is going to speak to us through the activities of the day, or the quietness of prayer.

In contrast, the person who superficially chooses God, but does nothing to grow in union with God, seek the presence of God continuously, or acknowledge sinfulness, will not likely carry with them a sense of humility, failing to see the need for contrition or the grace of God in life, except when needed. God has not been allowed to pervade every aspect of the life of such a person.

The "Fire" is being tended to be God who shares his love with us so completely that those who truly desire the presence of God have only one desire, and that is to love him as completely in return. This is when it seems as nothing else around us matters. It is also when Brother Lawrence teaches that if we do not return to outward things we could perpetually find ourselves disconnected to the world in which we live. And as long as we need to live in this world, we cannot be so disconnected as to cause disdain for others who would wish the fire to be extinguished.

But we can love God with great desire as we come to share his giving for others in the world. We remain in God's presence, we recognize the magnificent ways in which God's presence is revealed to us, and we share these gifts as best as possible. Our focus becomes the sharing of the gifts and the living of God's life, which makes the very presence of God all the more alive for us each moment of the day. We realize that we are living as grace-filled children of the loving Father.

NEXT WEEK:
***The Usefulness of Practicing
the Presence of God.***



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YEAR'S GOD FIRST SERIES**

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