

# Just A Closer Walk With Thee — A Lifetime Journey

We associate the following African-American Spiritual with New Orleans, Mardi Gras, the Blues, and in many cases (as it has been portrayed) with funerals.

In reality, it is a spiritual for the growing in union with the Lord as we move through this life. It is a seeking oneness with God. Look at the words.

Refrain: *Just a closer walk with Thee,  
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea,  
Daily walking close to Thee,  
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.*

Verse 1: *I am weak but Thou art strong; Jesus keep from all wrong; I'll be satisfied as long as I walk, let me walk close to Thee.*

Verse 2: *Through this world of toil and snares, if I falter, Lord, who cares? Who with me my burden shares? None but Thee, dear Lord, none but Thee.*

Verse 3: *When my feeble life is o'er, time for me will be no more; guide me gently safely o'er to Thy kingdom shore, to Thy shore.*

Now this understanding is far less than what we have been studying concerning our practice of growing in awareness of the presence of God. In our practicing the presence of God, we have been called to live in Spirit and in Truth with a humble heart, so we may grow in a profound union with God even as we live each day. Brother Lawrence would suggest that this is necessary now so that we may also recognize the offering of God in the Kingdom.

But we've been talking about "The Walk" and where it leads us, and how it draws us, and what it means for us.

Having gone through the maxims and teachings that lead to our awareness of the presence of God in all of life, and of those things required of us in practicing the presence of God, we come to the final instruction of mystic Brother Lawrence.

It is wise that we return to past bulletin inserts to refresh ourselves continually on what is essential for us to continue this practice, and to continue for foster our awareness of the presence of God in our lives.

**For those not having past copies of the bulletin inserts, they may be obtained at the parish office or by going online at [www.st.johnthebaptistparish.net](http://www.st.johnthebaptistparish.net).**

## THE USEFULNESS OF PRACTICING THE PRESENCE OF GOD

**First:** *The first useful thing that the soul receives from practicing the presence of God is a faith that is more alive and more active in every aspect of our lives, particularly in our areas of need. Living this way easily obtains grace for us in our temptations and in the inevitable contact we have with created things. The soul that is accustomed to exercising its faith through this practice sees and*



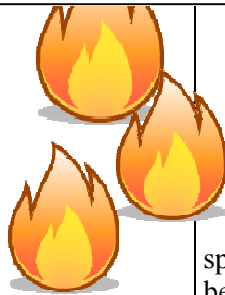
*feels God's presence by simply remembering God. It invokes Him easily and effectively, and obtains what it needs. By doing this it somewhat approaches the state of those who are already enjoying God's presence in Heaven. The*

*more it advances, the more its faith becomes alive, and finally its faith becomes so penetrating that it could almost say, "I no longer believe; I see and I experience."*

## GOD FIRST

Year Two, Part 15

*The Prayer of Awareness*



Imagine slaves singing the above-mentioned spiritual. That's where it came from — people, human beings oppressed, and holding onto only one thing — faith that God cares about them more than anyone here on earth. The hymn was known from heart as teaching slaves to read was forbidden. It became part of the experience of life. God became a sharer in the humble life.

"Faith in need" grows as we grow in turning to the Lord more than turning to the world and the limited response it can provide. It becomes part of life, and grows in the heart as God's presence is sought, and his grace is enjoyed more and more. Faith allows the believer to know in the heart the presence of God. With this comes the assurance of grace, God's life.

This becomes true even in our own most difficult times and struggles. As Brother Lawrence indicates, grace becomes so much more present to us that we immediately call upon this help from the Lord God, and know the peace that it brings instantaneously.

This practice causes us to slow down even to the slightest degree, simply because we cease in our own doing and allow God's doing to be recognized in and through us. We seek, "just a closer walk with Thee".

**Second:** *The practice of the presence of God strengthens*

our hope. Our hope increases as our spiritual knowledge increases, as our faith lays hold the very secrets of God. By finding in God a beauty surpassing not only physical bodies on earth, but the beauty of the most perfect souls and of angels, our hope is strengthened. It is reassured by the very greatness of the blessing to which it aspires and which it sometimes actually foretastes.



The spiritual hymn referenced above is based on hope. If there is nothing else in this world that can lift me, save me, strengthen me, then I must have hope that the promise of God is one that will be fulfilled.

**In this teaching, faith leads to a growing spiritual knowledge of the secrets of God. Knowledge draws us to hope in the fulfillment of what is known and unknown concerning our loving God.** Pope Benedict’s newly released encyclical carries with it a similar teaching of the purpose and need for the virtue of hope in our spiritual formation and growth.

The circle of our spiritual life is constantly renewed — faith leading to the necessary openness to truth and knowledge, which gives reason for hope again and again. At last the union we seek with God is brought to a most perfect fulfillment, even if only for the briefest of moments here on earth.

Brother Lawrence wishes us to realize that God blesses those who seek him with times of great bliss, of his overwhelming presence. Moments of great grace then enable us to hope for what is not seen, and, in some situations and times, to experience that which is not seen. But it is done so in perfect peace as only God can provide.

**Third:** *Practicing the presence of God inspires in the will a disdain of created things, and sets it ablaze with the fire of sacred love. Being always with God who is a consuming fire, this fire of sacred love reduces to ashes all that can be opposed to it. The soul, so kindled, can no longer live except in the presence of its God. This divine presence produces in the heart a holy ardor, a sacred zeal and a passionate desire to see God loved, known, served, and worshipped by all creation.*

Imagine, being consumed by God, now! But that’s what sacred love does — for us, in us, and when in union with the will of God, through us so that the God of all creation might be given perfect praise. When we contemplate the Sacred Heart of Jesus, we find our perfect model of man allowing the consuming fire of God to bring about perfection

Willing the will of God cannot be taken lightly. It is not for ourselves that this is done, other than the desire to

be in perfect union with God. The practice of the presence of God moves us to willing God’s will so that our entire beings — mind, body, spirit, and soul are joined to the plan of God for ourselves and others. We enter joyful bliss that we are counted worthy of this gift, this sharing.

It creates a longing that absolutely nothing else can come close in comparison. Parents will do anything for their children, and even more for their grandchildren. Can this be given up to acquire the sacred love of God, to have God’s consuming fire within? It doesn’t have to be. The desire that springs forth in our living in the presence of God is to have all of creation — children, grandchildren, etc., come to this same sacred love and fire. It is seen as the only gift of true meaning to offer others.

**Fourth:** *By practicing the presence of God and by gazing inwardly at Him, the soul so familiarizes itself with God that it spends almost all its life in continual acts of love, adoration, contrition, confidence, thanksgiving, offering, beseeching, and all other excellent virtues. All these acts may even sometimes merge to become nothing less than one single continuing act that no longer comes and goes, because the soul is always in God’s divine presence.*

#### **Final note of Brother Lawrence**

*I know that there are few people who arrive at this stage; it is a special grace with which God favors only a few chosen souls, since in the end this steady, simple gaze is a gift from His generous hand. But I will say for the consolation of those who wish to embrace this holy practice, that He ordinarily gives this gift to souls who prepare themselves for it. If He does not give it, we can at least, with the help of His ordinary grace, acquire by the practice of the presence of God a state of prayer that comes very close to this simple continual vision of God.*

Most of us, with few exceptions as noted above, must continue to have “just a closer walk with Thee” since the grace to have the beatific vision constantly before us is given to so few. This is for good reason. It is extremely difficult to live in this state and in the world at the same time. St. John of the Cross tells us the same thing. But if our “walk” is sought with eyes and heart intent on seeing God in all, then we can condition ourselves more and more for the grace to enter into this state, even periodically, on our journey to the perfect vision, perfect union, with God.

Ours may be to practice the presence of God so that these moments, even when they come and go, lift us and draw us ever closer to God in indescribable ways.

We’ve come to realize that in practicing the presence of God, we’ll desire to abandon self and recognize that all is grace — the giving of God for our sake.

The practice of the presence of God — our awareness of God ever faithful and true — is God loving us as we seek to return the gift in our more perfect love than when we started.

