

WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY Cenacle

MARCH 12 & 26, 2026

Notes

Practicing the Presence of God: Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*. Newberry, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2022.

In January we investigated the devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus and in February we looked at the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In March we are going to take a brief look at a form of spirituality developed in the 1600's by a Carmelite Monk named Brother Lawrence. His writings, brief as they are, are considered spiritual classics and are contained in a book entitled "*The Practice of the Presence of God*." As I was searching for something to present for tonight, I looked at 2 other titles as well. How to *Listen When God is Speaking* by Fr. Mitch Pacwa and *Abandonment to Divine Providence* by Fr. Jean-Pierre De Caussade. When I went on line to find more books about listening to God, I stumbled upon this title which caught my eye. In some ways all three of these books address similar ideas. What is the best way to draw closer to God in our spiritual life? By listening to God, abandoning ourselves to his Divine Will and practicing the presence of God every minute of our lives.

Being Lent, this is a good time for us to deepen our relationship with God, especially Jesus, in light of His passion, death and resurrection. But how does one do that? For each one of us, how we do this will

differ. Some will delve more deeply into Sacred Scripture, some will become more faithful to praying the Rosary, for some it will be reading more about the life of Jesus especially the Paschal Mystery, and for some it will be to become more faithful to attending Mass, etc. In all these situations, we are simply trying to grow in our faith and draw ever more closely to God.

Brother Lawrence was born Nicholas Herman in Lorraine Province in France around 1605 from parents of very humble means. He converted to Catholicism in 1629 and after serving as a soldier and a footman for a while he desired to enter into religious life. He was accepted into the Carmelite Order in Paris around 1649.

As a brother in the order, his primary duties were to work in the kitchen preparing meals, cleaning up the pots and pans and scrubbing the floor. Brother Lawrence never liked working in the kitchen but from this assignment which he worked at for much of his life, he developed a spirituality which transformed drudgery into devotion. He attended to all the liturgical and spiritual exercises required by the order, but since much of his time was spent away from formal prayer he developed a means by which to remain in continual prayer with God, even while scrubbing pots and pans.

He learned always to remain in the “Presence of God”. As Jesus and St. Paul instructed us, “pray always” (Lk 18:1, Ephesians 6:18, 1Thessalonians 5:17). Brother Lawrence admitted that this process although very simple in concept is difficult in practice since all of our minds are constantly flitting about. So, to remain focused takes much time and effort. He realized: **“The time of business does not 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 tranquility as if I were on my knees at the Blessed Sacrament.” (p .2, 26)

The fundamental virtue upon which Br. Lawrence bases his whole prayer life is Faith. He realized that with faith one can ride out the storms of life in perfect tranquility, unaffected by temptation, turmoil, anxiety etc. But this takes time and the grace of God to be so filled with faith as not to react/over react with emotion. Even the Apostles as they were crossing Lake Galilee, had not yet developed faith enough to believe that all would be well by the mere fact that Jesus was with them in the boat. After calming the storm, Jesus asked them, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”(MK 4:35, MT 8:25, LK 8:22-25) In the process of focusing on God in faith, one develops over time the virtue of indifference, the ability to undergo various experiences without becoming emotionally tangled up which causes disappointment, stress, anxiety, extreme happiness, etc because with faith one is always assured of God’s presence in your life. Br. wrote : **“The practice of the presence of God is the shortest and easiest way to attain to Christian perfection. It is the form and life of virtue, It is the great preservative from sin.” (p. 13)**

So, what is the Presence of God? It is the continual adoration of God in our hearts by uniting our hearts in love, conversations, prayers, loving glances, offerings of all we do and say, and begging forgiveness when we may have sinned or offended God. The practice of the Presence of God is not the unending focus on **our** successes or failures. Rather, If we fail, we beg forgiveness and go right back into adoring God in our hearts, forgetting ourselves and focusing again on HIM. God will provide all the graces necessary to attain a more perfect adoration of

Him in our hearts. We live in such a distracting and frenetic world that learning to be quiet within our souls is most difficult. But our desire to practice the presence of God in our souls will help turn off the incessant babbling in our brains and help us to focus on God, his perfections and great love for us.

Some key points in practicing the Presence of God in one's life is:

1. Giving your whole self to God. Brother Lawrence began his journey to spiritual union with God by giving up everything for God and His love. He forgot self and offered all of himself to God. **"I know that to practice it right, the heart must be empty of all other things, because God will possess the heart by Himself alone. He cannot possess it alone without emptying it of everything besides Him, so neither can He act there and do in it what he pleases, unless it is left vacant to him."** (p.91)

2. Faith- everything revolves around faith in God's presence in our lives and our trust in His love for us. Brother Lawrence wrote **"Faith alone can reveal Him or teach me what He is . By faith I learn more of God, and in a very little time, than I could do in the schools after many a long year."** (p.15) He also wrote a prayer about faith:

"Oh! Faith, faith; oh! marvelous virtue, which illumines the spirit of people and leads them on to the knowledge of their Creator.

Oh! virtue altogether lovely. So little known and still less practiced, yet which, once known, is so glorious, so full of unspeakable blessing." (p.15)

3. Asking for grace - calling upon God for the graces we need to get us through the day. We constantly struggle, when in great love and faith,

we should call upon God to help us. In our day and age, we rely heavily upon our knowledge, reasoning, and intellectual processes to find solutions, when calling upon God to help us through with his grace would be more beneficial for our souls. He said **“Life is full of perils and of hidden reefs, on which we will shipwreck without the continual assistance of the grace of God. Yet how can we ask for it unless we are with him?”** (p.16)

“ If you would go forward in the spiritual life, you must avoid relying on the subtle conclusions and fine reasonings of the unaided intellect. Unhappy they who seek to satisfy their desire therein! (p.16)

4. Indifference - by accepting God’s will in all matters, we leave our desires, expectations and hopes to God knowing God will do what is best for us... if we let him. Brother wrote **“It matters not to me what I do, or what I suffer, so long as I abide lovingly united to God’s will – that is my whole business.”** (p. 13) Brother practiced perfect resignation to God’s will for love of Him and if he failed he begged God’s forgiveness and believed completely that God had forgiven him. Then, he simply went on his way, adoring God in his heart, and never looking back.

5. The fulfillment of our duties in life regardless how small or insignificant they may seem to us – through the mundane, small and necessary duties of our life done with and for the love of God, we fulfill what God has called us to do and being focused on God, especially when hard a/or difficult, He will get us through. Brother prayed before undertaking any task **“ O God, since Thou art with me, and it is Thy Will that I must now apply myself to these outward duties, I beseech Thee, assist me with Thy grace that I may continue in Thy presence. To this**

end, O Lord, be with me in this work, accept the labor of my hands, and dwell within my heart with all Thy fullness.” (P.14)

In summary, Brother Lawrence found a very simple method to be in constant communion with God throughout each day of our lives. It is not easy since so many things impinge upon our complete giving of ourselves and functioning in this distracted, demanding and almost a-human world. But as he said: “

“We search for stated ways and methods of learning how to love God, and to come to that love we disquiet our minds by I do not know how many devices.

We give ourselves a world of trouble, and pursue a multitude of practices to achieve a sense of the presence of God.

Yet it is so simple.

How very much shorter and easier it is to do our common business purely for the love of God, to set His consecrating mark on all we lay hands to, and thereby foster the sense of His abiding presence by [constant] communion of our heart with His!

There is no need either of art or science-we can go to Him just as we are, simply and with single heart.” (p. 27)

As I thought about these three French spiritual masters, Br. Lawrence (1605-1691) and his method of practicing the Presence of God, Fr. Jean-Pierre De Caussade (1675-1751) with his ideas pertaining to the Abandonment to Divine Providence and St. Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897) and her practice of The Little Way, we have all we need to attain

to perfect union with God without any extravagant or complex methodologies. God the Father, Jesus and the most Holy Spirit simply want us to adore & love them as fully as possible as they love us incomprehensibly in a mutual communion & exchange of uninterrupted love.