

Brother Lawrence and Star Wars

Whenever I go on vacation (about once a year), I take lots of books and rarely find the time to read them. This time, having been unable to join my family right after Christmas, I just took five days to be with them in California and decided to take only one book and a short one: Brother Lawrence's "*Practice of the Presence of God*". Not only did I read the entire book (only 100 pages), but I tried to apply it: to become more aware that since my baptism God is always present inside me and that I can have a conversation with Him at any time. This is what Brother Lawrence did for the last 40 years of his life. His humble duty was to cook for the other monks of his monastery in Paris (about 300 years ago). Even while preparing food, he kept conversing with God, or feeling His Presence in the Silence of his Heart. Brother Lawrence had an amazing FAITH IN GOD. He had an amazing HOPE that one day he will be united with God forever and ever. He had an amazing LOVE for God and for everyone he encountered in his daily life. Those three great theological virtues - Faith, Hope and Love- were the foundation of his daily life and in many ways, he attained on earth a union with God that most of us are unable to imagine.

Another clear message from Brother Lawrence's short written reflections is that his closeness with God helped him to carry his CROSS every day with JOY. Even when he was severely ill and in great pain during the last few years of his life (he died at the age of 80), he did not show any outside sign of anguish to the point that some of his brother monks thought that despite a major illness he was in fact not experiencing any suffering. We can all learn from the holy life of Brother Lawrence. All the readings of last weekend must have been "music" to the ears of Brother Lawrence: "*Be HOLY for I the Lord am Holy...You shall not wear any hatred in your heart against your brother or sister. Take no revenge. Cherish no grudge against any of your people. You shall LOVE your neighbor as yourself.*" (Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18); "*Offer no resistance to one who is evil...Turn the other cheek.. LOVE YOUR ENEMIES and PRAY for those who persecute you...BE PERFECT just as your Heavenly Father is perfect.*" (Matthew 5:38-48); "*Brothers and sisters, YOU ARE THE TEMPLE OF GOD AND THE SPIRIT OF GOD DWELLS IN YOU*" (1 Corinthians 3:16). I invite you to reflect on the above short quotes and see how they apply to both you and Brother Lawrence. Like Brother Lawrence, all of us, since our baptism, have become "TEMPLES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT". So indeed, we do not have to go very far to encounter GOD: HE IS WITHIN US!

On the other hand, while Brother Lawrence was close to perfection while still on earth, most of us, including myself, are so far from that perfection only found in true, total union with God. I was reminded of some of my imperfection in an ironical way during my short vacation. We went to spend one full day at Disneyland. I confessed one of my weakness: I cannot stand roller coasters, but anything else will be fine. But it was not. I was wrong. I agreed to board the Millennium Falcon of STAR WARS. I thought it would be fun. I know almost nothing about Star Wars (apart from the robot R2-D2 and spaceship battles). We were only six people sitting in the cockpit of Millennium Falcon (we had to wait one hour and half in line). I was assigned to be one of the two engineers into back. I thought it would be easy. I was simply to push down any light that would flash. I did not expect that the spaceship would be moving in worse ways than a rollercoaster: up and down, left and right in sudden jerks! It was most painful, not knowing what worse would come next. Everyone else in my family seemed to have a wonderful time ...These were among the longest 10 minutes of my life. My only relief was when we stopped for good! The irony of this Star Wars ride with my family was that not one single second during these long 10 minutes did I practice the presence of God: I could have simply closed my eyes, ignored to push those blinking lights and asked God to help me go through this insane ride. But I did not!

Yes, we are all CALLED TO BE HOLY that is to be set apart for God. But we know we cannot do it alone. Only when we accept to receive the graces that God keeps pouring upon us, can we change. God loves each one of us. Let us trust in His Love and Mercy! As we have entered this 40th Lenten season at OLHOC, let us remember that the LORD JESUS IS OUR ROCK AND SALVATION. There is no other way to Heaven than Jesus Himself. He is the gate! Let us pray that as a family of families we will use this Lent to Reconcile with God (Confession) and be united with HIM and in HIM, in the EUCHARIST. Let us also keep praying for each other. I want to take this opportunity to thank you for all your prayers for my prompt recovery from flu. The LORD IS GOOD. ALL THE TIME. LET US PRAISE HIM TOGETHER!

One in Christ,
Fr. Alain