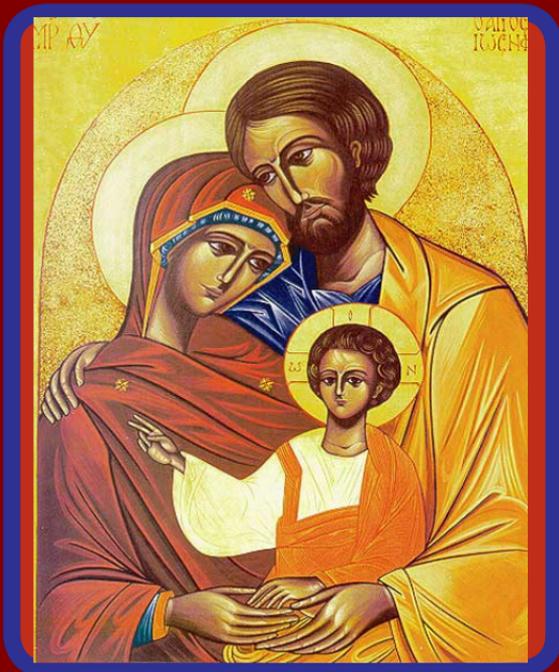


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Editor

Edward O'Donnell, OCD
EdODonnell@aol.com

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CHRIST'S BIRTH AS ONE OF US is the greatest gift that God has given to us human beings. The mystery of God becoming a human person stretches the bounds of reason. In fact, only faith is able to grasp such a magnificent outpouring of Divine love. As we continue in this season of Advent waiting, we echo the cries of the liturgy and its insistence that God will come and be with us:

“Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!

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Gerard Manley Hopkins' Incarnational Vision?

THE FRENCH MYSTIC Simone Weil writes eloquently about the importance of attention in our lives. Her concept of attention is a lofty one. She believes that “absolutely unmixed attention is prayer.” Such a stunning comment took my breath away when I first read it.

Is it possible that during my life I had actually prayed each time I offered my absolute attention to something Other? I had to meditate upon this question for a long time before I understood its answer. First, I had to explore the real meaning of the word attention, or rather what Weil meant by attention. I looked up the definition of attention in my *American Heritage Dictionary*:

- 1. Concentration of the mental powers upon an object; a close or careful observing or listening.*
- 2. The ability or power to concentrate mentally.*

The word concentration leapt up at me, and I looked at its definition:

- 1. To direct or draw toward a common center;*
- 2. To direct one's thought or attention.*

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Fortified with definitions, I explored what attention entails. What happens when I focus on one thing? Am I thinking when I focus? No, thinking is temporarily set aside. When I have completed my act of attention, thought returns, and I am then free to think about what I have observed. In an act of attention, where was “I,” my ego, my identity of who I am? It disappears. If I am attending to something, I cannot simultaneously think and focus. If my attention shifts from attention and thinking, then I have a divided mind, thus an inattentive mind.

It is now not such a great leap to understand Weil's definition of prayer, for when one loses one's ego in an act of pure attention, it is the most opportune time for us to pray to God, allowing us to hear his “still, small voice.” This self-forgetting is the *sine qua non* of prayer, and all the mystics, both of Christianity and other religions, have taught this truth: When the ego dominates life, there is no room at the “inn” of consciousness for God.

Attention and Beauty

Weil also writes about a “marriage” of attention and beauty. Weil believes that beauty is God's way of luring us to him. She boldly compares the beauty of God's creation to a snare to win us to him. When we offer our attention to beauty, whether it be the

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beauty of the sky, the sun, a tree, a flower, or the face of a beloved person, we are attending the beauty of God. Weil believes, as does St. Augustine, that the source of all beauty is God. Thus, every time we offer our attention to beauty, we gaze upon God's hidden presence and he at us, to the point that the observer and the observed become one. Attention, therefore, allows us to partake in divinity.

When we were children, we all possessed a sense of attentive wonder. We were a sponge absorbing the world. Place a baby in a trilingual family, and he or she will speak three languages. The child is also filled with delight in the world. Poets have written about this stage of a person's life. Henry Vaughn writes:

*Happy those early days! When I
Shined in my angel-infancy....
But felt through all this fleshly dress
Bright shoots of everlastingness.*

His verse reflects the Platonic belief that the child has left heaven behind but still retains a memory of it, still obliquely aware of his or her eternal roots, reflected now in the world's beauty. William Wordsworth also comments on this "angel-infancy":

*There was a time when meadows, grove and
stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem / Appareled in celestial light.*

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But as a person grows older, the vision is lost. Wordsworth writes, "The things which I have seen, I now can see no more."

Vision Restored

There is, however, a way to retrieve this wondrous vision. Mystics and poets have learned that by developing one's powers of attention, one can again see the world with eyes that have been cleansed. The mystical poet Blake calls it the cleansing of our "doors of perception," and the cleansing process involves acts of attention. Christ too reminds us that "unless you are as one of these [children], you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." Christ is not only referring to heaven after death but to the heaven of God's creation lying before us.

We cannot truly enjoy the beauty of our world unless we see with a child's eyes. Their eyes are attentive because no ego comes between themselves and their seeing. Thus, the biggest obstacle to our ability to pay attention is our ego. In forgetting our ego, we win attention. Or as Christ reminds us, "In losing yourself, you will find yourself." We find, consequently, both ourselves and the heaven of the Holy Now.

Hopkins and Attention

The poet par excellence of attention is Gerard Manley Hopkins. Of late, Hopkins has been the subject

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of a number of books. In the last two years, two novels about him have been published. One of our finest Hopkins scholars, Dr. Paul Mariani of Boston College, has published a masterful, best-selling biography—*Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Life*—glowingly reviewed in *The New Yorker*.

Hopkins has much to say to us about how to live fully in our modern world. Although he was a Victorian poet and little of his poetry was published during his lifetime,

Hopkins speaks to modern readers about the beauty that daily surrounds us

Hopkins speaks to modern readers about the beauty that daily surrounds us, beauty that most of us are

blind to because we have not cultivated our powers of attention. We are the generation of Attention Deficit Disorders. There is certainly an ADD syndrome that demands medical assistance, but for most of us our lack of attention is “cured” by acts of will—we can will ourselves to be more attentive.

As a young man, before Hopkins went on to Oxford and before he converted to Catholicism, he was greatly attracted to the beauty of the world, which he often felt compelled to capture by drawing in his journals. His drawings reveal not only his artistic talent but also his exquisite attention to trees, flowers, plants, hedges, sky, and monastic ruins, the latter a common sight throughout the

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English countryside. He learned to pay attention to nature's most miniscule aspects, as taught by the critic/writer John Ruskin. Ruskin writes:

“Nothing must come between Nature and the artist's sight; nothing between God and the artist's soul. Neither calculation nor hearsay—be it the most subtle of calculations or the wisest of sayings—may be allowed to come between the universe and the witness which art bears to its visible nature.

“The whole value of that witness depends on its being eye-witness; the whole genuineness, acceptableness, and dominion of it depend on the personal assurance of the man who utters it. All its victory depends on the veracity of the one preceding word, *Vidi* [I saw].” (*Elements of Drawing*)

Thus all things are all divined-sparked. Hopkins rejects the notion of nature being merely symbolic of God. It is, rather, “charged with the grandeur of God.” Let us look at the poem that contains this beautiful phrase.

God's Grandeur

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared*

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with toil;

*And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell:
the soil / Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.*

And for all this, nature is never spent;

There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;

And though the last lights off the black West went

Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast and with ah!

bright wings.

Incarnational Vision

If Hopkins is the poet par excellence of attention, then “The Windhover” is the poem par excellence of Hopkins’ “Incarnational Vision.” Notice the title: the poem is dedicated to “Christ Our Lord.” We are alerted to pay attention to the verse, but we are also charged to see beyond the image of the poem: to Christ Our Lord.

The Windhover: To Christ Our Lord

*I caught this morning morning's minion, king-
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn
Falcon, in his riding*

*Of the rolling level underneath him steady air,
and striding*

*High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wim-
pling wing*

In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,

Gerard Manley Hopkins' Incarnational Vision

*As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend the
hurl and gliding*

*Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird,—the achieve of; the mastery of
the thing!*

*Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride,
plume, here*

*Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then,
a billion*

*Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my cheva-
lier! / No wonder of it: shéer plód makes plough
down sillion*

*Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermillion.*

Hopkins' Focus

The poet's attention is focused upon a windhover, a falcon commonly seen in Wales when Hopkins attended St. Beuno's College, a Jesuit seminary. The poem is a first person lyric. By caught, Hopkins does not mean he actually captured the kestrel [falcon]. He caught sight of it. But he is not quick (as a bird) to reveal what he has caught; he plunges immediately into metaphor: he has caught sight of the mornings "minion," daylight's "dauphin," and then he finally names the thing seen: "Falcon." A minion is someone who is favored or esteemed in a royal court. A dauphin is a crown prince.

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These are unusual metaphors for a bird, but because they are stunning comparisons, we sit up and take notice. The Falcon has royal quality about it. We then remember that kings often had pet falcons perched upon their arms, usually their eyes hooded. When the king desired to watch his falcon do what he does best, fly and pursue prey, he would undo the eye-mask and free the falcon into the sky.

Hopkins watches the falcon in the sky. He watches its motion, how it maneuvers itself with the wind. The falcon possesses a computer-like knowledge

**Hopkins' poems
serve as eye-openers**

about how to maintain its place in one area of the sky, at the same time its eye on the earth below waiting to

see if food in the form of a small animal moves into sight. Hopkins rapturously watches the bird, describing the bird itself as if it were also in a state of "ecstasy." This description is a classic example of what T. S. Eliot calls the "objective correlative," in which we project onto a thing those feelings we are experiencing.

Look to the sky, the poet seems to say, and see Christ. Look upon the earth and see Christ. He is omnipresent to those with eyes that see, those whose eyes can move from egotistic self-gazing to attending the vestiges of God's beauty ever before us.

Gerard Manley Hopkins' Incarnational Vision

Hopkins' poems serve as eye-openers. They teach us to open our eyes to the divine beauty that surrounds us so that we too can possess an Incarnational vision.

Robert Waldron lives in Boston. He is the author of *Walking with Gerard Manley Hopkins, A Poet's Journey* and *The Secret Dublin Diary of Gerard Manley Hopkins*.

St. Augustine on the Love of God

But what is it that I love in loving Thee? Not physical beauty, nor the splendor of time, nor the radiance of the light—so pleasant to our eyes—nor the sweet melodies of the various kinds of songs, nor the fragrant smell of flowers and ointments and spices; not manna and honey, not the limbs embraced in physical love—it is not these I love when I love my God.

Yet it is true that I love a certain kind of light and sound and fragrance and food and embrace in loving my God, who is the Light and Sound and Fragrance and Food and Embrace of my inner being—where that Light shines into my soul which no place can contain, where time does not snatch away the lovely Sound, where no breeze disperses the sweet Fragrance, where no eating diminishes the Food there provided, and where there is an Embrace that no satiety comes to sunder. This is what I love when I love my God. (*Bk. X, ch. 6*)

Unexpected Joy

THE PSALMIST ALMOST NEVER leaves us in the depths of despair. Even when describing the most painful of humanity's sufferings, he seldom tires of writing lines like this: "Happy are all who take refuge in him." These words from the Second Psalm are a good way into a meditation on my latest spiritual insight. I never tire of reviewing my almost eight decades of conscious and continuing search for God, and I am struck by the way my faith has gradually deepened but still keeps challenging me with question after question.

Here in the last refuge of our retirement community apartment, I confront the mystery of the intense personal joy that arises from taking care of my wife, Irene. And it comes from the most mundane of actions. At our table in the community dining room I hold her hand softly, because when she isn't feeling especially well, she finds a small gesture like this sustaining. I, too, am sustained. One feels almost guilty as though the joy that comes from helping a suffering other must be somehow selfish and wrong. Many people around me share my dilemma.

Unexpected Joy

The Cross

My thoughts return constantly to the cross: the central symbol of our faith. And I do not mean that plain golden angular thing suspended above the usual Protestant altar. I am thinking rather of a crude wooden monstrosity spattered with a victim's blood. No good thing but from suffering? No salvation of man without this horror? Old age hammers down the insight that this is exactly the way progress—spiritual and otherwise—takes place in our world. Life from death is the only road we can take toward becoming as God. As Henri Nouwen, in *Compassion: A Reflection of the Christian Life*, insists:

By setting out with Jesus on the road of the cross, we become people in whose lives the compassionate presence of God in this world can manifest itself. (p. 29)

The paradox is that such a walk results in the deepest of joys.

Most of us spend our lives trying to be happy: television, movies, alcohol, sex without love, computer games, or popular fiction (for those of us who still read). When we center our existence on ephemeral things like these, we turn our backs on what we were created to become: people who grow daily in knowledge and works of loving God and neighbor—and who experience the joy from them.

Unexpected Joy

It is not easy to write a book, paint a picture, play the piano well, or to be a good parent or husband or wife—no good without effort. In my own long life, it is those things I have striven for most desperately that in retrospect bring the most joy in memory. I hate to write; I love having written.

Human beings, made in the image of God, know pain and suffering. Then, too, must God, because an image is a reflection. As conscious animals, we are well aware of the central role of suffering and pain

in making one fully human. We

We cannot escape this central need for human struggle

cannot escape this central need for human struggle. So, here as I near my own earthly end, I must somehow learn to accept

God's presence in the experience that serving a suffering beloved other affords the highest joy I, as a human being, have known.

Down deep, I am convinced that none of us wants a mere sugar-coated existence. The higher the bar successfully leaped, the greater the satisfaction. Any athlete will tell you that. Christians believe that Jesus' agony ultimately resulted in humanity's greatest blessing—salvation. Thus, to sit around decrying our lot—laying blame on Adam and Eve for our sin and pain—is to ignore God's ultimate grace.

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I have few specific details about what my neighbors in this retirement community have suffered in their own lives. In our constant conversations, we tend to reflect only on the good times. But most have experienced pain and most have emerged from it as loving and understanding human beings. Our neighbors, by and large, accept their lot and go out of their way to help the rest of us. Love is the Christian way—we learn through pain and suffering how to truly love.

If we want to live as the mere animals we partially are, fine and good, but something more drives us ever onward. We know that we will not advance unless we sweat for it and, truthfully, perhaps not even then. But let's not gripe about the situation—we cannot change it anyway. Let's struggle to understand that's the way God made it. Because, in the end, living in love for one another is the one needful thing we are called upon to do.

Advancing in Love to Joy

That we advance in love only through the pain of strong effort is another graceful gift from God, perhaps his final and most generous one. God's infinite hope is that we learn to love as he loves: himself and each other in spite of anything. And that requires the utmost of our powers. The universe could have been framed differently as a means to fulfill our

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potential to become more like God. But faced by the daily challenges of caregiving—I sometimes succeed, frequently fail—I am sustained by what God continually teaches me through these struggles. Overcoming is the only way we advance. I'm being prepared to meet the ultimate challenge: death.

How can I simply accept that serving someone who is suffering results in the deepest of joys? It is almost too much! My only response is that life tells me it is true. I may fight against it because it suggests that suffering is somehow another loving, gracious gift from God.

How can I simply accept that serving someone who is suffering results in the deepest of joys?

But that's what the old rugged cross means, and it is demonstrated in this retirement community day by day.

When we stop fighting the need for struggle and begin to accept that this is God's way—the way it must and should be—we are on the right road toward attaining our highest human potential. Too much human effort is wasted in the pursuit of happiness, an unobtainable goal.

Still, even around here, the staff tries to keep us "busy." We must ignore "busyness" and redirect our energies into suffering ourselves to do our best to alleviate the suffering of others, which is rife around this place. We can never ease it all,

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but a high degree of satisfaction comes when we at least do something: one prisoner visited, one beggar fed or given a cup of water—one wife served.

Loving another sacrificially is the hardest thing God calls upon us to do

These simple acts lead to human joy. Kenneth C. Haugh in *Christian Caregiving* (Augsburg, 1981) insists, “The Lord isn’t merely gritting his teeth and using imperfect humans: he likes it that way!” (p. 12). As an imperfect human, I’ve learned to like it that way too.

Loving another sacrificially is the hardest thing God calls upon us to do. But how radical is the satisfaction when we answer the call and fulfill our love to the best of our abilities. In the face of clichés, such as “The caregiver usually dies first,” I can only respond, “So what!” Jesus was profoundly right when he told us above all to love God and neighbor. As with so many spiritual mysteries, human beings must accept this truth by faith and struggle to live by it always.

William R. Matthews, PhD, was Professor Emeritus of English. He spent most of his educational career at Lutheran colleges. He was a widely published essayist, with appearances in *The Lutheran*, *Spiritual Life*, *Catholic Digest*, and *Lutheran Partners*.

The Prayer of Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection

AFTER RECEIVING the last sacraments as he lay dying, Brother Lawrence was asked what he was doing, what he was thinking about. “I am doing what I will be doing throughout eternity,” he replied,

I am blessing God, I am praising God, I am adoring God, and I am loving him with my whole heart. This is what our vocation is all about, brothers, to adore God, and to love him without worrying about anything else.

This encapsulates Lawrence’s attitude to his prayer and indeed to his life. Camilo Maccise, former Superior General of the Discalced Carmelites, describes Lawrence as understanding in a remarkable way the charism of Carmel: “To so dwell under the gaze of the living God as to experience, in a mysterious way, the ineffable Presence who lives within us.”

Brother Lawrence was born Nicholas Herman in 1614 at Hériménil, a small village in Lorraine, France. We know practically nothing about his

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family and early life, apart from a short note in the Eulogy written by Joseph de Beaufort and published a year after Lawrence's death in 1692:

His mother and father were fine people who led an exemplary life. They inspired the fear of God in him from his childhood and took particular care for his education, presenting him only with holy maxims in keeping with the Gospel.

At the age of eighteen Lawrence had a profound experience of God that was to affect him for the rest of his life. One winter's day he was looking at a tree

Lawrence had a profound experience of God

stripped of its leaves, when he realized that in a little while its leaves would reappear followed by its flowers and fruit. This simple experience

of seeing this tree that appeared to be dead and realizing that it would come to life again changed his whole life. It was at this moment that Lawrence began to realize in a very special way the presence of God in his life, and the providence of God, and the power of God [Sciurba (tape)]. Lawrence then became a soldier, fighting in the Thirty-Years War, before returning wounded to his parents' home in 1635.

After an attempt to lead the eremitical life as a hermit and some time as a valet in Paris, Lawrence made the decision in 1640 at the age of twenty-six to enter the Discalced Carmelites on the Rue

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Vaugirard in Paris. He entered as a lay brother, taking the name Lawrence of the Resurrection. He was to remain here until his death in 1691, at the age of seventy-seven. The writings we have by and about Lawrence we owe to his biographer Joseph de Beaufort, priest and later vicar general of Paris.

These consist of a series of thirty-seven maxims and sixteen letters that were written by Lawrence and four conversations recorded by de Beaufort shortly after each meeting. A resume of Lawrence's teaching was put together by de Beaufort and called, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, as well as two biographical sketches, the *Eulogy* and *The Ways of Brother Lawrence*. Together these give us a good insight in Lawrence's way of praying, this "simple attentiveness and general loving awareness of God." In this article I shall look at Lawrence's teaching on prayer and the simplicity of his way, a way that is open and available to us today if only we have the courage to persevere.

The Ways of Brother Lawrence

The Ways of Brother Lawrence was published in 1694 by de Beaufort, who states at the beginning, "I will write what I myself heard and saw concerning the ways of Brother Lawrence." This small book gives us a sense of who Brother Lawrence was and what undergirded his life of prayer. Lawrence spent

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the first fifteen years in the monastery as cook to about one hundred friars, a job to which he had “the strongest natural aversion.” Yet he was able to state that he possessed God as peacefully in the commotion of his kitchen as he did when kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament. De Beaufort describes him as never harsh:

His heart was open, eliciting confidence, letting you feel you could tell him anything, and that you had found a friend.... He spoke freely and showed great goodness.... Once you got past his rough exterior you discovered an unusual wisdom.

Lawrence lived the virtue of humility to the depths of his being. He was content with any place, any task:

Instead of paying attention to his dispositions and examining the road he was walking, he looked only to God, the end of the journey. Therefore he made great strides toward him by practicing justice, charity and humility, more intent on doing than on thinking about what he was doing.

When he learned of evil, he was not shocked, rather, he was surprised that things were not worse, given the “malice of which a sinner is capable.”

“Practice of the Presence of God”

Lawrence’s description of his way of prayer is the “practice of the presence of God,” that is, to take

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delight in and become accustomed to God's divine company. Lawrence also described it as "attention to God; silent conversation with God; trust in God; the life and soul's peace." It is a habit formed by repetition of acts and by frequently bringing the mind back into God's presence. In order to acquire this way of prayer, Lawrence stresses the need for purity of life and then fidelity to this practice and to the fostering of the awareness of God within. Lawrence understands the needs of those beginning this way of prayer. He gives examples of the words beginners could use interiorly, such as, "My God, I am completely yours" or "God of love, I love you with all my heart." It doesn't actually matter what words are used, but rather it is the fact that one can fix one's mind on God alone. Lawrence is not concerned that, when describing this prayer, he is repeating himself:

You will tell me that I always say the same thing. It is true. I know of no other means more appropriate or easier than that! And since I practice no other, I recommend it to everyone.

A necessary prerequisite is the "desire to learn the trade" (De Meester, p. xxxv). Lawrence accepts that at the beginning it is very difficult and advises us not to be discouraged when we fail: "When I realize I have failed, I acknowledge it and say: this is typical; it's all I can do!" As he wrote to one of his

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correspondents about a nun who wanted to advance faster, “You don’t become a saint in a day!” Our only concern in this life should be to please God, or, as he expanded this thought in another letter, “to be with God, and to do, say or think nothing that could displease him.” Whatever we are doing, whether it is manual work, or reading and writing,

even during our religious exercises and vocal prayers, we must stop for a moment, as often as possible, to adore God in the depths of our hearts, to savor him.

For Lawrence, this simple awareness of God “is the holiest, the surest, the easiest, and the most efficacious form of prayer.” Lawrence described how he would carry out this practice in his periods of activity as well as during prayer, so that “repeating these acts, they become more familiar, and the practice of the presence of God becomes more natural.” This conversation with God takes place “in the depths and center of the soul.” He describes how we should “make an oratory of our hearts, where we can withdraw to converse with him.”

He describes how we should “make an oratory of our hearts”

When we are aware of the fact that God dwells within us and know this as a reality in our lives then, as Lawrence tells the same correspondent, we do not have to be in Church to be with God. I do not

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think that Lawrence is saying there is no need for church, as some might interpret this; rather that God can be with us at all times and in all places. This is because prayer had become such an integral part of his life that it didn't matter where Lawrence was or what he was doing; he was always in the presence of God.

This practice of prayer was not an end in itself. As Lawrence would have learned from the writings of St. John of the Cross, we need to go beyond the consolations of God to seek God himself. Lawrence tells one of his correspondents that this exercise—the practice of the presence of God—does not hurt the body, but that it is appropriate “to deprive it occasionally, and even with some frequency, of some innocent, permissible, little consolations” that we might find consolation only in God.

But consolations are not the reason for seeking God: “We must not seek consolations from this exercise, but must do it from a motive of love, and because God wants it.” In order to do this, we must empty our heart of all that is not God and renounce all that is not God.

Lawrence held to this teaching all his life. In a letter written six days before he died, he wrote: “

*Let us devote ourselves entirely to knowing God....
Let us not settle for seeking or loving God only for
the graces he has given us or can give us.*

The Prayer of Br. Lawrence of the Resurrection

Benefits of this Practice

The last section of his *Spiritual Maxims* is concerned with the benefits the soul receives from this practice. These are centred on the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. For Lawrence, these alone can conform us completely to the will of God, and, for the one who practices these three virtues, everything is possible.

According to Lawrence, the first benefit is that faith increases and “becomes more intense and efficacious in all life’s situations, and especially in times of need.” The person praying in this way “sees and senses God present by a simple remembrance.” It also strengthens us in hope: “[Our hope] grows and is strengthened to the extent that our faith penetrates the secrets of the divinity by this holy exercise.” Finally, this practice inspires the will and “inflames it with a sacred fire of love”: “God who is a consuming fire reduces to ashes all that is opposed to him.” This produces “a holy ardor, a sacred zeal and a strong desire to see this God loved, known, and adored by all creatures.”

Lawrence never lost the recognition of his total dependency on God. In conversation with Joseph de Beaufort, he impressed on him the need to ask God for help in events as they happen. He related how when on a trip to buy wine in Burgundy, for which he had no experience and had to cope with

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a crippled leg and the problems travelling; he did not worry: “He told God it was his problem, after which he discovered that all was accomplished, and all was done well!”

Echoing the teaching of St. Teresa of Jesus, he found joy everywhere doing little things for the love of God (cf. *Interior Castle* VII: 4.15): “The Lord doesn’t look so much at the greatness of our works as at the love with which they are done.” Lawrence said “that our sanctification depends not on changing our works, but on doing for God what we would normally do for ourselves.”

There is a real feeling of joy and peace that comes across from Lawrence’s writings. This was not some hard penitential grind done out of fear of a stern God. He had such an intimate relationship with God that he could act in no other way. To a correspondent he wrote, “My tranquility is so great that I fear nothing. What could I fear when I am with him? I cling to him with all my strength.” Lawrence stresses that all too often it is we who ignore God rather than his being unreachable:

God paints himself in the depths of our souls, yet we do not want to see him there. We leave him for foolish things and fail to converse with our King, who is always present within us.

The Prayer of Br. Lawrence of the Resurrection

“Methodless Method”

The “Practice of the Presence of God” has been described as a way of orientating ourselves toward God (Moran, p. 2) and as the “methodless method” (De Meester, p. xxxvi). In fact, Lawrence spurned the methods of his day:

We look for methods to learn how to love God. We want to get there by I don't know how many practices. A multitude of methods makes it more difficult for us to remain in God's presence. Isn't it much shorter and more direct to do everything for the love of God?

It was love of God alone that led him on. He stripped prayer to its essentials, until what he said was simplicity itself. He described himself as having “no other interest than the pure love of God.” Lawrence describes this way of prayer as a habit. This idea has been expanded by Fr. Salvatore Scurba in his tape on Lawrence:

The more that we work at it, the more we turn to God, the more that we recognize that God is present within us. The more that this becomes a part of our life, it becomes a habit in a good sense, not in the sense of something artificial, forced, mechanical: but rather this is the way we are, this is what we become. We become more and more aware of God's presence within us; it's natural and a habit in a good sense.

The Prayer of Br. Lawrence of the Resurrection

Lawrence describes private devotions as a means to arrive at the end, but they can be superfluous when our prayer has reached the depths he describes:

If, then, we are with the one who is our end by this practice of the presence of God, it is certainly useless to return to the means. We can continue our loving exchange with him, remaining in his holy presence sometimes by an act of adoration, praise, or desire, other times by acts of oblation, thanksgiving, or anything else that our minds can devise.

Relevant for All People

Lawrence presents us with a way of prayer that transcends time and denominational boundaries. It is as alive and present to us today as when he was writing and speaking in the seventeenth century. Lawrence managed to combine the active life with an intense life of prayer that all Christians can follow (Moran, p. 1). He shows us how, in the midst of a busy life, we can pray continuously, giving praise to God at all times, in all places, in all circumstances. Just two months before his death, Lawrence wrote in a letter “I am still very content.” De Meester in his general introduction comments:

The etymology of the word contentment comes from the fact that everything “tends together” towards its goal, that there is no internal division.

The Prayer of Br. Lawrence of the Resurrection

Lawrence was a man of one purpose, straightforward, a rock, a stable, free being who found his simplicity, his harmony, and his dynamism in the presence of God. (p. xxxviii)

Joseph de Beaufort, toward the end of his second book, entitled *The Ways of Brother Lawrence*, commented on Lawrence's relevance for all people:

Although Brother Lawrence lived a hidden life, all people, no matter what their personal circumstances may be, can benefit from his example as given here. He teaches those involved in the world to turn to God to ask for the grace to fulfil their responsibilities, to deal with their concerns. He teaches them to turn to God in their conversations, even during their leisure time.... This is not a theoretical devotion that can only be practiced in the cloister. Everyone must adore and love God.

De Beaufort goes on to say that the constant prayer St. Paul urges for all Christians (1 Thess 5:17) consists in just this type of prayer.

Lawrence—with his emphasis on nothing but love of God and the joy found in doing this—is indeed a beacon for the rest of us as we seek God in prayer. Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection died on February 12, 1691, “in the same peace and tranquility that had characterized his life.”

Sr. Christina Nunn, OCD, grew up as an Anglican and, after studying at theological college, she was ordained as a deacon in the Church

The Prayer of Br. Lawrence of the Resurrection

of England and worked in a parish for three years. She was received into the Catholic Church in 1999 and is a member of the Carmelite Community at Ware, Hertfordshire, England.

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St. Teresa of Avila

Mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us



Have A Blessed Christmas

Book Notices

I Believe: The Promise of the Creed

By Pope Francis

Paulist Press Cloth \$20.00

“I believe in the surprise of each day, in which will be manifest love, strength, betrayal, and sin, which will be always with me until that definitive encounter with that marvelous face which I do not know, which always escapes me, but which I wish to know and love. Amen.”

Drawn from his writings, interviews, and homilies, *I Believe* provides an intimate window on the Pope’s personal faith and an incomparable introduction to the gospel. Organized around the principle themes of the *Apostles’ Creed*, these short readings make it clear that the *Creed* is more than a list of dogmatic propositions. It is an invitation to encounter the living God in the deepest place in our hearts. And that encounter inspires us to action: to give witness, to practice greater charity, to live in the truth. The Pope’s words are also a challenge—to meet the God of surprises, who makes all things new, who accompanies us on our journey. For anyone seeking a more authentic life, this is a book to carry and treasure.

Act Justly, Love Tenderly:

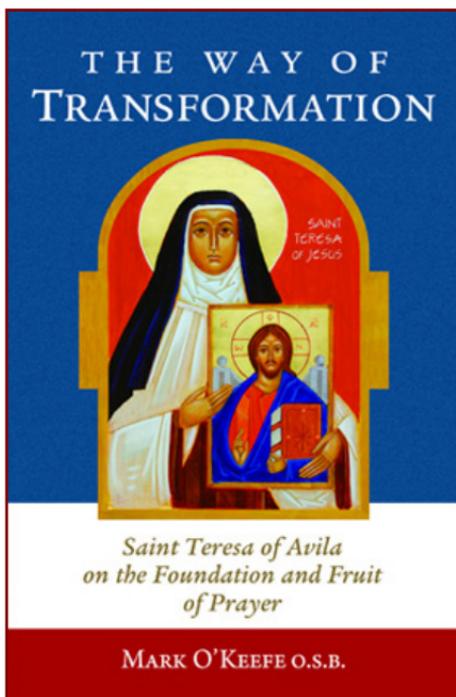
Lifelong Lessons in Conscience and Calling

By John Neafsey

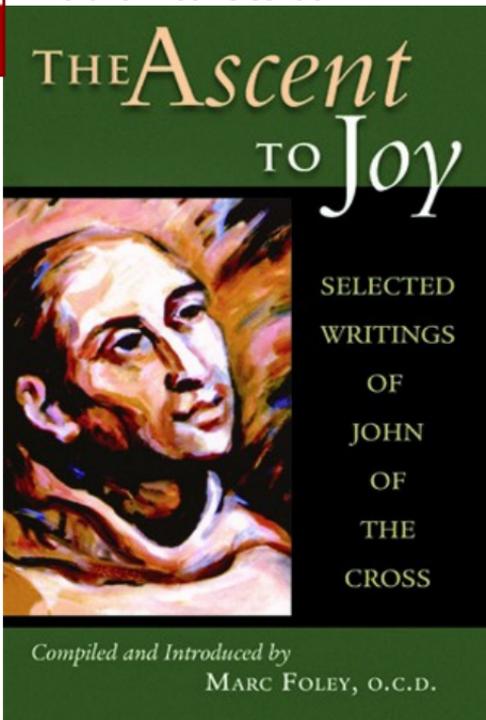
Paulist Press Softcover \$26.00

In *A Sacred Voice is Calling*, John Neafsey outlined the connections between vocation and social conscience. In this book, he shows that vocation is more than what we do for a living. It is also about the kind of people we are meant to be and how we are meant to live. It is not something reserved for particular moments of decision; it is an unfolding process over the whole of life—from childhood to adulthood and old age.

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