

CONVERSATIONS WITH
BROTHER LAWRENCE

DOG DAYS



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Dog Days

Is there anything more draining than a day of work out in nearing triple digits heat? If Hell is anything like this, I don't want to get anywhere near it. But then heat in Hell is merely a metaphor as we all should know. Having non-corporal bodies after we are dead means we will not feel cold or heat. But now I'm jumping to the end of the story. Better to begin at the beginning and let the meaning fall where it may.

It was indeed a very hot day when the brothers filed in for their noon meal. Most times they would simply take a paper bag with a sandwich along with them as they made their way along the fields. But since the heat wave hit our Brother Superior decided to keep the brothers nearer the monastery and have them come in for the noon meal.

So, as they filed in, I could immediately see that our Brother Superior was wise indeed in his decision for our dear brothers looked beat. The sun had taken all their energy from them and the older ones seem most distressed. Since I had kitchen duties this week, I hurriedly ran to bring lots of water to place before them so they could re-hydrate themselves.

Now our little kitchen provides us with one advantage, that being the ability to hear all that is being said during the meals while still washing and cleaning the dishes and utensils. Sometimes that is not so blessed especially when Brother Wolfgang prepares one of his experimental dishes. The we all get some prompt feedback whether we ask for it or not.

But this day the sounds were very muted. Not much was

being said. The clank of metal on porcelain and that was about it. I was silently hoping that Brother Lawrence would tell a story to help us forget our sweltering misery. But he too was silent. So, I continued to toil in the humid kitchen.

After everything was put away, I was able to join the other brothers in the meeting room for a spell. Since there was a heat advisory Brother Superior suspended all afternoon work except for what was absolutely essential. For some time, there was near silence expect for a few brothers catching a siesta. But Brother Lawrence was too tired to nap. I sat down beside him and together we shared the heated quiet.

After some time, I noticed, over in the shadows, our faithful dog Ralph, a golden retriever. Both Brother Lawrence and myself stared at Ralph, a picture of contentment. His closed eyes. The slow rising and falling of his body as he breathed. Even his tail resting for once told of peacefulness. Or so I thought.

Brother broke the silence with a whisper.

“You know, Ralph can teach us much dear brother.”

“How so”?

“Animals are not as “sophisticated as we like to think of ourselves as being. They merely focus on the now and let the rest fall where it may. Take Ralph over there. He does not worry about the weeds in the truck patch. He does not fret over the bills that need to be paid at the end of the month. Nor does he lose sleep over how we will get the supplies for the winter. He just rests.”

Being a dog lover myself, I had often envied the animals for their simple lifestyle and wondered what it would be like to be a dog. Of course, I would not want to be a small dog. All small dogs do is yelp and get under foot. Maybe a German Shepard or even a Golden Retriever like Ralph. But never, never a cat. And Heaven forbid I would be a Gerbil.

“I wonder if we should not wish to be more like the

animals.” continued Brother Lawrence. “Many of the saints have praised animals and some the great Christian literature has dealt with talking animals who teach humans spiritual truths, my favorite being the English Don C. S. Lewis.”

“For a minute Brother I thought you were reading my mind. I was just thinking about what it would be like to be a dog, a big dog of course.”

“Of course.” smiled Brother Lawrence.

Then out of my tired mind my mouth seemed to blurt out, “Do animals know God”?

After a brief contemplation, Brother Lawrence replied.

“I think they know God far better than we dear brother. They have faith. When the day is too harsh for their bodies to take, they rest. When there is nothing for them to do, they rest. When the future rises up in our minds threatening our trust, they rest. Silently. Peacefully. With nothing else but the moment to live. When there is action to be taken, they do. When there is food to be eaten, they certainly do.” he chuckled at this because Ralph is known for his always being around food. “And when there is love needed to be shown they do. When you think about it, it might be better if we realize that we should be more like our brothers the animals than to be more like humans. They are more angelic and we more like fallen gods.”

Fallen gods”?

“Don't you remember the story of the great Adversary Lucifer, Star of the Morning? In the deep mists of ages long ago, Lucifer was the most beautiful of all the angels. He was very powerful and very intelligent. So much like God, at least in his mind, that he wanted take the place of God. For that he was thrown out of Heaven along with his legends and given the realm of Earth to rule. For in the words of our beloved Dante, “Tis better to rule in Hell than to serve in Heaven.” But at what price for us? For now, we humans strive to rule

also. And so, strife enters our world because there can only be one ruler. Which one will it be?”

“One ruler brother, but many servants.”

Brother Lawrence's eyes slower raised to look at me for he had been slowly drifting into that state where the mind works but the body rests. As his gaze meet mine, he smiled.

“Thank you, brother, for teaching me so much. You have summed up my musings better than I could because you have been a servant to our God and only a true servant can teach how to serve.”

At that our heads turned towards our faithful Ralph who during all this quiet chatter had started to snore.

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