

CONVERSATIONS WITH
BROTHER LAWRENCE
GREED OR ENVY



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Greed or Envy

It doesn't take long while watching the evening news for someone to think there is too much greed in this world. Being as I haven't watched the evening news for some time you would think that this would hardly cross my mind anymore. But it does. And often. Why? Because I work with the poor at the local mission and wish I could do more to help these people. Many are in over their heads with troubles and I want to do more but there just isn't enough money to help them. And with the poor economy...

It was in this frame of mind that I happened upon Brother Lawrence pulling a load of carrots into our storage shed. He really shouldn't have been doing this much manual labor at his age but he has insisted on helping where-ever he can with the fall harvest. I saw him through the window as I was finishing up the dishes in our kitchen so I ran out to give him a much-needed hand.

“Ah Brother Mark. You are just in time to help an old man in need.” I got behind the cart and pushed it up the slight incline and into the shed where other brothers would unload it to our cellar.

“Thank you for your help Brother. I'm not as strong as I used to be, I'm afraid. My mind says I am but my body tells me otherwise. How tricky our mind is when we begin something and then it claims no responsibility for the accidents that result from our false pride.”

As we slowly walked back to the main building in our

monastery, I remembered my frustration. “I have a question for you Brother Lawrence. In my work at the mission I wish I could help these poor; suffering people more but there just isn't enough money do to so. Why is it that so many have so much and give so little when there is so many more who don't have and need even more then is given to them? I think I said that right, didn't I?”

A ready smile crossed Brother Lawrence's face and then it quickly faded. “I understand quite well what you are saying dear Brother. It is a question as old as there have been people walking on this earth. As old as Cain and Abel. But unfortunately, there has been little head-way in understanding the resolution of your frustration. I'm afraid that that same frustration has led to two of the seven deadly sins: greed and envy. Two sides of the same coin and money is right in the middle of it all. Of course, these sins have been around longer then our concept of money but none-the-less it is at the root of all evil.”

“But I thought it was the LOVE of money that was the root of all evil Brother?”

“And you are quite right. Having lived here the best portion of my life has often caused me to think more against money then I should. We here have taken our vows of poverty and have substituted our quest for money for work and faith in our Lord's providing. There is indeed nothing inherently wrong with money but I have rarely meet anyone who has handled it correctly, including me I'm afraid.”

“Then why does not God simply do away with money all-together or maybe it is just the current system of economics that is wrong and needs to be done away with. Something has to be done as so many people are suffering simply because they don't have enough money.”

“Again, I totally understand where you are coming from Brother and I admire your love for those who need our help

but I also warn you that you are coming dangerously close to committing one of our aforementioned deadly sin; envy. You see those who have more than you think they need and you think they should give to those who you think need it more. Then you begin to think of ways to get the money from those who have it under the guise of the Robin Hood method; taking from the rich and giving it to the poor. You envy those who have because in your mind they are greedy and since they are sinning the just thing to do would be to punish them by taking their money and giving it to those who need it more.

“See how our adversary has drawn you down his road to sin? I ask you, who made you God that you can judge rightly about what is greed? I don't doubt that it may look as such and it may indeed be greed on the part of those who have and give not but what we see and what God sees are mostly two opposites. And remember, it is sin to take God's place in judgment.”

“I understand Brother but it seems God is very slow in dealing out his judgments and the poor are hurting right now. So, what am I to do? Am I to turn my back on those in need? How can I help them if I have no resources? And where can I get those resource unless I get the money from someone else who has it?”

I was getting quite perturbed with Brother Lawrence's seemly uncaring attitude and I thought it may be time for me to do something myself instead of doing all this waiting on God.

“Let me ask you a question Brother Mark. Do you realize that our Lord spoke more often about the correct use of wealth than any other topic? And yet we are still haunted by the specters of greed and envy. But just one instance may suffice here. You remember that our Lord was betrayed by his apostle Judas who controlled the purse strings of the little

band that followed Jesus. I think his betrayal started after one of the wealthy women poured some rich perfume over Jesus' head. He became indignant that someone would waste this expensive perfume when it could have been sold and the money given to the poor. However, Jesus said that this woman had done a good thing as she was preparing his body for his upcoming crucifixion and burial. Of course, Judas may have also liked the idea of having a little more money in his purse but we are not sure but I think that our of that moment of envy greed entered into his heart. He then found a way to make a quick 30 pieces of silver simply by taking justice into his own hands. All he needed to do was to lead the religious leaders to Jesus. Nothing more. Easy money. We don't know exactly what he was thinking at the time but we do know it started and ended with money. But poor Judas. After taking the seat of judgment over what he saw as Jesus' extravagant use of expensive perfume, he would eventually judge himself as being guilty of betraying his Lord and died a horrible death by his own hand. In the end his tainted 30 pieces of silver was used to purchase a potter's field for the burial of the unclean. What a terrible lesson to learn about what envy and greed can do to even one who eat, slept and obeyed our Lord in person?"

"So, beware my Brother when you think all is so simple and clear. We only see things as in a fog but our Lord sees the heart and knows the how to judge rightly."

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