

CONVERSATIONS WITH  
BROTHER LAWRENCE  
MOLEHILLS &  
MOUNTAINS



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## Molehills & Mountains

Night was gradually winning its struggle with the sun and dark shadows were overtaking the meeting room. In a far corner Brother Lawrence sat seemingly oblivious to the darkening. I turned on a lamp nearby and Brother raised his head.

“Deep in thought Brother?” I asked.

“More like deep in learning a lesson, Brother. It seems the older I get the more I have to learn. You would think it would be otherwise but alas it is not so.”

My immediate thought was that if Brother Lawrence, who is the wisest person I know and who everyone in our monastic community and beyond regards as the person to consult on all things spiritual, if Brother is overcome with all the lessons HE has to learn, what hope is there for the rest of us?

“What lessons are you talking about, Brother?”

“Those of Faith dear Brother. 'For if we have Faith the size of a mustard seed, a very small seed indeed, then we can say to this mountain 'Begone' and it will throw itself into the sea.' That is a paraphrase from our Lord. And yet I still find myself with Faith even smaller than the smallest of seeds from my herb garden. It just gets so frustrating that I am tempted into despair!”

“Now Brother. Yes, Faith IS a big deal but it is something everyone struggles with.” Here I found myself in the awkward position of consoling Brother Lawrence when he usually is

the one consoling me. I guess it proves we DO need each other no matter where our strengths may lie.”

“You are quite right Brother. It is a 'big deal' and one that our very eternity rests upon. But there I go again, making a mountain out of a mole-hole; or is it mole-hill?”

“What has precipitated this perplexity?” The words just spouted out of my mouth, seemingly coming from someone far more knowing than I. In fact, I had to think about what I had just said to make sure I had actually said them and knew what I had just said. I think.

Smiling, Brother raised his head smiling. “Yes, it is very perplexing indeed, but not something to get ‘un-perplexed’ about either. But this goes beyond the mere speculative theological debates we engage in here in our comfortable monastery. Outside these walls are people who are hurting. They are hurting because they don't have jobs. They are hurting because they can't pay their bills. They are hurting because they can't seem to control anything around them making them feel helpless, inadequate and scared.”

For a while I just sat there knowing that there was nothing I could say to 'un-perplex' the situation. But I did know that sometimes the best help you can provide is just being there.

Brother Lawrence began speaking again as he pulled out of his pocket an envelope. “I got a letter from my nephew Ryan today. It takes a lot for someone to write an actual letter these days, printing it out and sending it in the mail. It has been over two years since he lost his job and there doesn't seem to be any opportunities for him ANYWHERE. With the Internet he can search all over the country for a position but none seem to be available that matches his talent and experience. He wrote me that he has sent out hundreds of resumes to positions all over the country and never a call-back. I guess there are job recruiters now that represent you to companies but he says they are contacting as many as they

can simply to fulfill a quota or they will lose THEIR jobs. He is getting quite discouraged indeed.

“As you know, Ryan is my favorite nephew, actually my ONLY nephew, but I find it very interesting that of all the people in his life he is coming to me about money. He has had to move back in with his parents and THAT is a hard thing to do, but necessity moves us to do the unpleasant. Over the months he has sold almost all of his positions, all except those that can get him work. His car is on its last legs, as he says, and now he has no money for gas having just spent all his savings to pay his car insurance. He is broke.

“I guess when you have no money, you think that those who have taken a vow of poverty will understand; and I DO understand. I pray for him often. But here I sit, many miles from him, with no money of my own to give him, thinking how much we have to depend on God for our every need. At least we Brothers can work to supply our food along with our job of praying for the Church, but as for actually helping those who are in such dire financial straits, I feel like I have nothing substantial to give.”

We just sat there, together, as the night grew longer. It was nearly time for sleep which we all disparately needed. “Well Brother, as you said, there is really nothing more you can do. I have to get up very early to work in the kitchen so I must say goodnight.”

Looking back now I realize that maybe I was a bit too abrupt in my leaving but I was very tired and as Brother said, there was nothing we could do. But now I think that at least I could have sat there with my friend, giving him the moral support that is so undervalued by those who can give it.

The story does not end here. As so many real-life experiences do, what may be solved in a mere half-hour sitcom on TV keeps us awake at nights for days on end. It did Brother Lawrence. Sometimes I would sit there with him for a

while. Sometimes I would simply go over and pat him on the shoulder as I went off to bed. But I knew Brother was doing more than worrying. He was taking his petitions to our Lord and Savior who loves us and is moved by our love for others, and by our Faith. Faith is not only a word but a way of life, a way of thinking that can either die or survive and grow stronger. All this is done through prayer, talking to the one who we have Faith IN. It is not some “airy” concept but a personal God that cares.

I have kept the fact from Brother Lawrence that sometimes I too just can't take it anymore; even here in the monastery. I get so mad at God and “let Him have it” with my inner screaming. But even then, there is a support under my despair that doesn't let me free-fall into utter hopelessness. I don't deserve this support, but it is there none-the-less. I only hope that Brother Lawrence's nephew Ryan understands that no matter what happens to us in this life, we are not alone. And sometimes that is enough.

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