

CONVERSATIONS WITH
BROTHER LAWRENCE

MORE



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The mail comes to the monastery in the early afternoon. Since our time online is severely limited, for those of us who know how to use the Internet, this is the primary means of communicating with the outside world. We have one Brother who reads all email sent to the monastery. Sometimes people send notes to the Brothers via this email. Brother David then writes out the note and delivers it. There are no cell phones here and there is only one land-line, that being in the Brother Prior's office. Again, any call to one of the Brothers is answered by Brother David and the message delivered. As you may imagine, this can cause some of our family and friends conniptions trying to decide how they will send us a message. Some type us emails as they normally would but then they print them out, address an envelope, put stamps on the envelope and insert the letter in the mail box. Whew! Is it any wonder we get so few letters? Most just don't want to go to all the bother so we gradually hear less and less from the outside world. I wonder what Brother Lawrence would say about that?

Today was a normal day with the noon meal having been eaten, those of us assigned to kitchen duty were just finishing our chores. The mailman was spotted pulling up to the mailbox and Brother Ben ambled out to fetch it. When he returned, in his hand were several letters and one small package. The package turned out to be Brother Ed's blood pressure medicine that we ordered for him online.

“Brother Lawrence. Brother Lawrence,” announced Brother Ben to all who could listen in the main meeting room. Brother Lawrence appeared from behind a large chair and walked briskly to Brother Ben.

“What do you have from me Brother?”

“Here.” Brother Ben thrust an envelope into Brother Lawrence's hands.

I watched as Brother slowly opened the letter. I could not remember when Brother Lawrence last received a regular letter. He has sometimes received short notes sent via email or phone. It had been speculated by one of the other younger Brothers that Brother Lawrence was an orphan or was on the run from the law or even worse, from the mob. These last speculations came from one Brother who had watched way too much TV in his recent youth.

A sad face grew on Brother Lawrence and he slowly walked over to a chair and flopped down.

“Bad news Brother?” I asked approaching.

“The saddest. A dear cousin, who was a very devout Christian, has passed into the Lord's presence. I guess you could say it is a great gift for him to be with our blessed Lord, but for me to never see him again, this side of eternity, is indeed sad.”

“How did he pass Brother.”

“Diabetes I'm afraid. It goes to prove once again that Sin has its consequences.”

“But you just said that your cousin was a devout Christian. Why do you say he was a Sinner?”

“Did I say he was a Sinner? But yes, he did Sin, as we understand Sin, here in the monastery. Outside, you see, some do not recognize Sin for what it is. Some even celebrate it. But Sin always has its day. In the end it exacts his “pound of flesh” and we all suffer for it.

“But you said your cousin suffered from diabetes. The last

time I checked, having diabetes was not a Sin Brother, unless you know of a more recent revision of the Bible than I do.” I smiled sheepishly, saying this I hoped to bring a small smile to Brother's face with my small joke. Since Brother's expression didn't register any change, I guess my joke was too small.

“Diabetes is no Sin, but in my cousin's case, Sin caused the diabetes just the same.” Turning to me he asked, “You are familiar with The Seven Deadly Sins Brother?”

Of course, I having gone to Catholic school and being very active in my church's youth groups, was taught early on about the Seven Deadly Sins. But I suspected that Brother was speaking on a deeper level this time than making a simple inquiry. “Yes Brother. I am.”

“It seems today, in the outside world, Sin is celebrated for most people do not see the consequences of Sin or they simply choose to ignore them or rationalize them away. But death is hard to rationalize away.” He exhaled a long, halting breath from deep within and stayed silent for a short time. I took this opportunity to pull up a chair next to him. His silent respects given, he continued.

“My cousin loved to talk and eat but not in that order. Each time we meet through the years he would take me on a long drive, out through the country-side, showing me the Amish farms and the new stores or factories. Lately it was more the closed stores and abandoned factories. But it was always what had changed since my last visit. Then we would sit down to a couple hours of eating. Not just a meal, mind you. but a feast not unlike the ones we all share here each Thanksgiving. But these times it was just the two of us. It was my cousin's way of showing hospitality. Of course, I very graciously partook, but tried my best to merely sample the varieties of dishes so as not to stuff myself to the point of regurgitation.

“These times were joyous affairs as cousin was a great story

teller, but he was also a person of great heart. He would often visit the jails in his community and try to talk to the young people there, hoping to deflect them from the path to self-destruction they were unwittingly trodding. His efforts shamed me as I never did visit those in prison, as the Bible encourages. But his heart was so big that it would outshine any guilt you might have in your own heart, when in his presence.

“But alas the eating caught up with him and he gradually gained way to much extra poundage for his good health. Doctor's warnings were left unheeded, and his health deteriorated to the point of hospitalization. It was determined that he had a form of cancer. Chemotherapy was recommended. Dutifully taking the therapy wasted his energy and from the letter I learned he could never regain his usual vim and vigor. Last week he passed.”

“I'm sorry Brother.”

“Yes, I too.” Then Brother took in a huge breath. “But he did it to himself. He fell prey to the Sin of gluttony. Enough was never enough. He always needed more. And more is what killed him.

“Sin is never the result, but always the cause. Sin is wanting more. And more. And more. More than our bodies and souls can handle. It burdens us to the point of collapse, and then death. It is an age-old warning but one that is seldom headed, and always given, whether we acknowledge it or not. Sin has its day and we all pay. I wonder if anyone thinks, when they are committing a Sin, that it is not only they who that must pay, but all of us. When one is diminished, we all are diminished. Only by the grace of God can some of it be reclaimed. Not all, because there is always less than before. But praise God that he paid the price for our redemption, so that we can be substantially healed here and totally healed in the hereafter.”

Then Brother Lawrence rose up and left in the direction of his beloved garden. I remained seated and left him to his memories.

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