

CONVERSATIONS WITH
BROTHER LAWRENCE

NO FREE LUNCH



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No Free Lunch

Lunch time! Oh, how I love lunch time. The morning chores are finished. The day is at its hottest. And I am tired. There is nothing that can refresh a person then a good lunch. Sit back and relax as you are brought just exactly what you ordered. Salivating over the mere thought of feasting on the scrumptious fair laid before you. Taking a nice, long swig of your favorite beverage. Putting it down with a satisfying “AHHHHH!” And then there is desert. Chocolate or fruit pie or maybe even a chilling Ice Cream. Oh, my taste buds are tingling.

“Come on Brother Mark. Let’s get going. We haven't got all day.” Brother Dominic loudly yanked me back to reality as he piled high the metal pots that needed washing and now, I needed to help him with cutting the vegetables for the stew that needed to cook over a hot burner. The kitchen was already aflame with heat from the stove, heat from the oven and heat from my dish water. The steamer had been recently installed to scald the dishes after washing because the health department didn't think merely using damp towels to dry them off was enough. So now I work in a veritable steam-bath. And this is BEFORE the dishes are dirty and I need to clean them all again.

But it was only ten o'clock and there was still too much to do before the other Brothers would come in for their noon meal. If only they appreciated all the hard work, I was doing all on their behalf. You would at least expect a “good job” once in a

while. Is that too much to ask?

Okay. Maybe the heat was getting to my simmering temper a bit so I decided to focus on the task at hand and give Brother Dominic, a hand.

The last couple of hours flew by and now I was serving the food to the Brothers as they filed by the serving area. When they had all set down and started to eat, I would walk around and make sure they had enough water in their cups. All this heat requires that the Brothers remain well hydrated and the cool water from the deep well sure quenches the thirst on a hot day like today.

Finally, after about an hour, the Brothers go out to sit under the large oak trees planted just outside the kitchen door. Leaning against the shaded trunk, several of the Brothers doze off and the others sit droopy eyed until the old tower bell dongs and out they go, back into the fields.

Some people think that all we Brothers do all day is pray; knelling on stone floors in darkened sanctuaries, candles burning incense and the low chanting of prayer echoing off high ceilings. I wish!

Of course, we DO pray for prayer is our main service to the Church, but we have to completely support ourselves anyway we can. Well not anyway as it has to be legal and moral; moral being the most important. Of course, there are a few very appreciated donations from various people and businesses. They are thanked not only with our verbal gratitude but also with our prayers for them, their families and for their livelihood. But growing our own food is a priority for us. That is why the Brothers work out in the fields, hoeing, pulling weeds, and tending the growing crops. If they don't, to put it bluntly, we don't eat. Of course, there are also the few cows to be fed and milked, the chickens to be fed and eggs to be picked, the pigs to be feed, etc. Those pigs in in their mud. Nice, cool mud. It almost makes me envious,

if not for the dirt factor.

And then there is the harvesting of the crops and the fruit to be picked and all to be either cooked, canned or stored. The chickens, cows and pigs to be butchered, smoked and canned. And of course, there is the continual need for cooking the food for the two meals we eat each day. There really isn't a formal morning meal in the summer. The heat is so great that the Brothers decided to simply carry a small bag of readily eaten food with them so they can get out early and work as long as possible in the cooler morning air.

Working in the kitchen is my duty. My good friend Brother Lawrence used to do my job until his age and health got to the point that Brother Prior thought best, he be transferred to house cleaning and to tending the herb garden. He has done his best to do his best at both tasks. However, with my being allergic to just about anything in the fields, it was determined that I could best serve the Brothers in the kitchen taking Brother Lawrence's place; if that is at all possible. But then we ARE only talking about kitchen duties, not teaching.

At first, I thought it would be much better to be indoors then out, but I was wrong. Or at least I thought I was wrong when one morning two of the Brothers were seen carrying Brother Ray in from the fields. He had been bitten by a small snake as he bent down to pull some weeds. At first, we were afraid Brother Ray was going to die some horrible death, screaming and writhing in pain as the venom coursed through his veins, quickly reaching his heart and then...gone. But it turned out it was not poisonous although Brother Ray had a reaction that required him to rest the rest of the day in bed; without food. He was just fine the next day.

In the mornings I have to do the prep work, preparing the potatoes to be slow baked, cut and clean the cabbage and lettuce and the other vegetables, take out the meat from the locker and cut, dice or whatever it needs before it is boiled,

fried or baked. And then there is the bread to be baked, the fruit to be washed and sliced and the deserts to be baked, cooked or frozen.

And then there is the constant cleaning. Since we have only a few of the more expensive kitchen tools we must be constantly washing them after each operation so the food doesn't mix or it would indeed be a unique flavor for your meat/pudding. And of course, the washing is my chore.

At times, as I watch Brother Dominic do his magic of turning plain field fair into mouthwatering dishes that fills the air with such smells that I am transported to another plain of existence allowing my taste buds to fantasize about what will satisfy these enticements, I want to become a chief. Often, I have asked Brother Dominic to allow me to assist him but he has always said that I must "pay my dues" cleaning up; for now. But that doesn't stop me from watching him work with my arms elbow deep in sudsy water, sweat dripping from my forehead and my sweaty shirt cleaning to my torso.

I did leave out how the Brothers take some of our produce into the local Farmer's Market and how Brother Dominic spends extra-long hours in the Fall turning fruit into freshly baked pies, strudels and other pastries to be sold through the local coffee shops. This extra money goes to buy the stuff that we can't grow or prepare ourselves. And of course, it buys clothe for our clothes and materials to repair or replace mechanical items.

I could go on and on but you get the idea. It is a never-ending cycle of work needed just to live here at the monastery.

Oh wait! How could I be so forgetful. What about Sunday? The Brothers decided long ago that since we wanted to make Sunday a day of rest from all our physical chores, including those of us who work in the kitchen, that on Saturday extra

bread would be prepared so that, along with fruits made readily available on the tables, no food would need to be prepared and all could devote themselves to our spiritual callings. For rest is not what a Brother does on Sunday. His real work is to pray the Offices and then to work in the Lord's harvest wherever that may be. That means some Brothers go to the local parishes to teach. Others go to serve the poor, assisting them anyway they can. Others go the nearby hospital and hospice to encourage those in illness or console those near death. But whatever we do we are called to be Jesus' witnesses to His great love. You could say that we work all week long simply so we can do the Lord's work on Sunday. But of course, we are doing God's work by praying all through the week. But for us this is not work. It is what we Brothers were born to do. I am what ALL Jesus' children are born to do.

No time off.

No free lunch.

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