

CONVERSATIONS WITH
BROTHER LAWRENCE
NOT MUCH BUT
EVERYTHING



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Not Much But Everything

When you don't have much, what you have means a lot. Let me explain.

As I've related in the past, here at the monastery we have all taken a vow of poverty. For most of you reading this, a vow of poverty doesn't mean that much, you have little to relate to it. Oh, you may think you are poor but when you get down to it most of you will have more than the richest king only a century ago. And if you are really poor, like not having enough food to eat or not having any clothes to wear, you should not be reading this but should be down at your nearest Christian center to get help.

But here is what I learned when I first came here to the Brothers.

Brother Conrad was then the hospitalier and he was in charge of setting me up with a room and bedding.

“Brother Mark, how tall are you?”

“About average height. Why do you ask?”

“Well, we have a short bed available and a longer bed available. Since most of us are of a shorter height, now that age has shrunk us, we are in short supply of short beds. Consequently, we have more long beds available.”

“Why don't you just ask for a long bed, then you can stretch out more and have more extra room.”

“Oh Brother. I can see you are but a novice here at the monastery. To ask for more than you need is to be selfish and

as my old Theology professor used to say, selfishness is akin to sin.”

At that I remained silent knowing that I wasn't in Kansas anymore. (Small reference to the movie Wizard of Oz to my young readers.)

“Brother Conrad, I would then ask for the longer bed if it is at all possible since my feet would hang over the end otherwise.”

“Very well then. You can have the back room. It is just big enough to hold a bed, a chair and a small table where you may study. Here you are. Place your few clothes in this locker here and you will be done. Then come to the Meeting Room and I'll introduce you to everyone. Hurry now for we have to be about our business. Idle hands are the Devils workshop.”

Of course, it didn't take me long to stuff my few clothes and toiletries in the small locker, really just a small wooden box that slid under the low bed. I took a brief look around noticing the cross on the wall and the small light on the table and out the door I scurried to meet my new Brothers.

The Meeting Room is the largest room in the living area of the monastery. There is a large fireplace on one end and several large chairs around it. These had been donated from an old men's club that had been torn down some years before as I was to learn later. The Brothers had been very careful in restoring the worn and torn leather to make them as comfortable as possible. Not that they wanted comfort for themselves but for the guests that we sometimes house. These are mostly benefactors or those who spend some time with us on spiritual retreats seeking spiritual guidance. It is that time when we Brothers learn about the outside world while consoling those who are in need of sanctuary. Since there are many more Brothers than chairs, the Brothers simply stood in a line waiting to welcome me.

As I entered the room, Brother Conrad took me to meet

Brother Prior first. He welcomed me with the normal warm greetings that he gives all new Brothers and then each Brother in turn shook my hand heartily and bid me welcome.

“Welcome Brother. We are so glad to have you among us. Welcome Brother, we all pray that you will find happiness in our midst. Welcome Brother, we can always use another strong hand around here.”

This last greeting confirmed to me the nature of my service here at the monastery. While most Brothers are of older age, there are few of us younger Brothers to do the “heavy lifting” as they say. Looking around it seemed to me that the Brothers looked far healthier and stronger than those of similar age in the world. In fact, they often looked much younger than their age revealed. And there was a peace and a smile on each face that I had not been familiar with until I joined the monastery.

“Brother, we are indeed most anxious to learn about you and how we may assist you in growing in God.” This greeting came from Brother Lawrence who I was to become a close friend, as all the Brothers had, one who could guide me into greater spiritual depths than I had thought possible. For now, though he just looked like a nice older man who had a very strong handshake.

“I am so glad to meet each of you and I look forward to helping out as best I can.” A small chuckle passed along the line. “Is there something I missed, Brother?” I asked Brother Conrad.

“Oh, I think you will quickly find that your help will be the least of your offerings here. And I think it will be us who may be helping you. But come Brother, I will show you where you will begin your service here at the monastery. Brother Dominic is waiting for you.”

Off we went to the kitchen; a rather large room filled with heat and humidity. I was glad I had on a light shirt under my

new robe because I'm sure it would be soaking wet before long.

“Brother Dominic, your new novice.” Brother Dominic as a short man with dark hair and a strong Italian accent that fit him perfectly.

“Brother Mark, it is indeed a pleasure to meet you. Now we must get to work before we are called to prayer. Hurry over there and bring me that sack of potatoes and I'll show you how to peel and dice them for me.”

Off I went and soon it was just like when I had started working at McDonald's. My former life had been one dead-end job after another with most being in fast food. This kitchen did remind me of those only here there were no friars. The same clatter of pans and dishes, everyone moving very quickly but purposefully. At my other jobs there was a lot more standing around and talking but here no talk, only short instructions to maximize efficiency. The ovens were large and had obviously been used in a commercial restaurant. They were older than most ovens I was familiar with. The stove was huge and could have been from the same kitchen where the ovens came from. I was to learn later that they had been in a large hotel that had upgraded their kitchens, the older equipment being donated to the monastery. Everything, I mean everything, was clean and in good working order in spite of obviously being heavily used.

“One should always take pride in your work and in your workshop.” Brother Dominic would say. I was to learn later that this was a common saying around the monastery and I think should be used in every work environment. But more on that later for the bells were calling us to prayers; our real work.

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