

CONVERSATIONS WITH  
BROTHER LAWRENCE  
TEMPORAL VS.  
SPIRITUAL



LARRY SLATER

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## Temporal vs. Spiritual

This little note was handed to our good Brother on Thursday morning by Brother David.

To Brother Lawrence;

I'm sorry but I can't be with you today for our scheduled meeting. A very important business problem has arisen and I have to take care of it. I would appreciate your prayers in this and hope that we can meet again soon.

Your nephew,

Ryan

While a little disappointed that he would not be seeing his favorite nephew this week, it didn't seem that important that he reply to the note. Being as most electronic communication with the outside world is limited, sending a Text or Tweet or quick email back didn't occur to Brother Lawrence. All the same, it caused some concern in that anything more important than talking about the Eternal with Brother is disconcerting.

But the day's work called, so off went Brother Lawrence to his calling of working in the fields. After the chores had been done and his religious duties performed, Brother Lawrence

retired to his cell or small room to meditate.

Now I know what you must be thinking. A Christian monk does not meditate. That is only for Tibetan or Hindu monks. But you would be wrong. Meditation on the scriptures is recommended in the Psalms and elsewhere, but on this occasion, Brother meditated on his nephew. He knew Ryan was facing financial problems, as all in the outside world seem to be struggling through these same economic perils. And yet Brother knew that all this is temporary and of little concern in the light of Eternity. Yet the temporal does tend to anchor us to this world and its deficiencies.

Even the monastery is not immune from concerns for paying bills. Still the Peace of God is sought more than a source of mere money. Does that sound too “spiritual” for those of us in the “real” world? Let us consider what Brother Lawrence had to say about it when asked by one of our younger monks at evening meal.

“Brother Lawrence, I have a question for you.” asked young Brother Anthony who is known for his forthrightness in asking questions, but also in his mulling over answers until he understands and applies the answers. “Pray tell me what is bothering you dear Brother.” Brother Lawrence really doesn’t usually talk this way, using such words as “pray tell” or other more formal English phrases, but he was in a rather playful mood and wanted to put a mock solemnity to the proceedings.

“Is it right to be preoccupied with worldly needs when our focus should always be on the spiritual?” One might at first glance think of the dichotomy between the material and the spiritual, but this is not what Brother Anthony meant. We had just been informed that the usual giving from the local parishes was down lately and consequently the amount available for the maintenance of the monastery was also lower than usual. This meant that some of our financial dispersments to the poor would be less. In addition, other

things. such as gas for trips into the local city and other none essentials, would be greatly curtailed. Of course, monks don't need much to sustain them as their vow of poverty is rarely "down-sized," but it did concern us that we would not be able to help the poor with their pressing needs.

"Let me ask you a question before I answer yours, Brother. Are you very familiar with King Solomon?"

"Yes I am."

"Then you know that even when he had more wealth stored up than anyone before him, he still was bothered by the meaninglessness of it all. His conclusion was that we should be happy with the work God gives us to do and be content with everything that passes through His hands to use for His use."

"That may be true Brother, but with all due respect, it is much easier to be spiritual when you are quite wealthy than when you are quite poor. When faced with the prospect of not paying your bills or going hungry or not having a job at all, one tends to be a little less, shall we say, introspective."

"Quite true Brother. And that is why I now look more to the pragmatic side of philosophy and theology than the mere speculative. For those of us who are called to serve in the academic ministries, as I was once, we tend to get caught up in the "airy" thoughts of ideas instead of the hard needs of this world, things such as hunger and pain. Yet I believe the words of our Lord will shed more light on our discussion than those of Solomon or Socrates."

"Do you remember when our Lord spoke of the flowers and how beautiful they were, and that even Solomon, with all his wealth, was not clothed as beautifully as they? When I look out over our garden and see the shimmer of dew drops setting off the glorious colors of the flowers, I think of this verse. And I also think of what our Lord was teaching about, for he also said that these flowers are here today and gone

tomorrow. They are really not that important compared to more pressing needs. Simply a blessed gift of beauty from our Master. But he also said that if God takes care of these flowers in this lavish way, how much more will he take care of us. Too often we take for granted the cost of sending His Son to us for our salvation, that we don't realize how easy it is for God to give us what we need and also how much his NOT taking care of us would cost.

“What do you mean by that last comment Brother, about the cost of NOT taking care of us?”

“If God does not take care of those who trust Him, who are not disobedient, who are not being selfish with their work or possessions, if He will not take care of these, then He is a liar.”

“How so Brother, as calling our Lord and Savior a liar is bordering on sacrilege.”

“I agree Brother. How can the father of Truth lie? And yet He has said that if we trust Him with all our heart and don't try to figure out everything on our own and then call on Him when we are in need, He will meet our need be what it may.”

We all thought on that for a short while until Brother Anthony said, “Maybe it is because we are on this side of eternity, bound by time, and cannot see what God has already done for us.” Brother Lawrence was taken aback by this last statement. “I see that your prayers for wisdom have been granted dear Brother, for this answer is beyond what a person would normally figure out on his own.” Then as if speaking to the Eternal Himself, “If only we could see with the eyes of God instead of through the eyes of sinful men, then maybe we would not worry so much about ourselves in the here and now.”

The rest of us were silent as we tried to grasp the meaning of this last exchange. In fact, my mind continues to wrestle with it here on my bed, waiting until the peace of the

unknowing draws its shadow over me and I fall into the mist of sleep, leaving wisdom to be grasped another day.

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