

CONVERSATIONS WITH  
BROTHER LAWRENCE

YOU CAN'T ALWAYS  
GET WHAT YOU WANT



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## You Can't Always Get What You Want

“You can't always get what you want.” I don't usually quote rock lyrics but this one fits my mood today. You see, I'm not as “cloistered” as the other Brothers here at the monastery. I run errands in the local town, chat with the local residents and actually carry on much as I did before I began my service here. Sometimes when I'm out and talking to someone in the parish I get so caught up in the goings on in the world that I forget I'm not of that world any longer. Sure, I may be “in” the world as we all are on this little planet, we call Earth, but not “of” this world having taken my vows to serve only God and not the desires of the flesh.

Most, when I say the desires of the flesh, immediately think of sexual desires. But I can tell you there are many desires that when indulged in can be just as sinful. Take for instance the desire to “Have it all. Right here. Right now.” Have you heard that before? I now hear of so many people who use that as their mantra that they spend every waking moment in pursuit of it. Take for instance my friend Lori. She runs the local thrift store and over the months I've gotten to know her while chatting with her while she gives me receipts for our donations. Lori tells me about her daughter who married her high school sweetheart and then right away bought their “dream house.” Both work full-time and hardly see each other. On the weekends they are so tired from all the upkeep on their house and cars and buying groceries and then trying to keep up with their friends' parties they have no time for

themselves or for their God. Just last week Lori said her daughter filed for divorce when she caught her husband “running around” on her. Now they have to divide up all the stuff they have and find a way to pay for it all separately.

When Lori told me this, I assured her I would pray for her and her daughter for that is my service to God and to his people. Lori smiled and I wondered what she was thinking. I hope she realized that our God takes care of us and our prayers are the most powerful weapon we have against the enemies in this world. But I really think she just thought it was sweet that I would think that something so trivial would actually be beneficial. But since I don't read minds and have enough trouble understanding my own mind, I gave her the benefit of the doubt and left her with a smile.

When I arrived back at the monastery, I spied Brother Lawrence coming in from the herb garden. He had that spicy smell that precedes him into a room that announces his arrival.

“Brother Lawrence! Lori from the thrift store says Hi!” Brother Lawrence had sent along a special mixture of spices for the tea that Lori likes and she was most grateful.

“How is Lori doing these days Brother?”

“She is doing all right. Her daughter is the one not doing so well.” I quickly filled in Brother Lawrence on what was happening.

“It is one of the oldest sins in the Bible my friend. It is written that Satan himself fell victim to this very same sin. It was not enough that he was called Star of the Morning nor that he was more beautiful than any other angel. No. He desired it all and he wanted it now. As a result, a third of the angels in Heaven fell with him from their heavenly abode and now they serve their lord Satan here on this world. As Milton put it...

A mind not to be changed by place or time.  
The mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a heav'n of hell, a hell of heav'n.  
[...] Here at least  
we shall be free; the Almighty hath not built  
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:  
Here we may reign secure, and in my choice  
to reign is worth ambition though in Hell:  
Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heaven.

“So now we all reign on the tiny globe, each to his own kingdom and each to his own woe. Sorry, whenever I start quoting poetry I start speaking in poetic terms. No sense in sounding too “housty touty” as they say.”

“Sometimes Brother, you slay me.”

With a smile Brother returned my reply, “I hope not to the point of death Brother or I will have to schedule another confession with Brother Prior.”

“Brother, since as you say we all reign on this earth, how is it that we all seem to be in constant servitude? I mean, if we were all kings or queens you would think we would have less work to do and be happier.”

“Quite true dear Brother, IF we were actually ruling over each other. However, in order to rule you have to have subjects and you can't have subjects if everyone is a ruler. So, you are left with a dilemma; if you must rule what will you rule over? Or is it what will rule you? I find that when one wants, or needs to have their desires fulfilled that they are often ruled by their desires. So instead of being the ruler they are the subjects being ruled over by their own desires. And these desires are self-destructive.”

“How are they self-destructive? How can desires destroy a person?”

“They do so by giving a person what they want. But their desires are only for themselves and they are never satisfied. Have you ever heard the story of the monkey and the jar? There was once a monkey who came upon a large jar. When the monkey picked up the jar and shook it he heard something inside. Looking in he saw a large, fresh date that must have fallen in. Now the neck of the jar was narrow but not so narrow that the monkey could not reach in and grasp the date. The trouble was that the monkey could not remove his hand from the jar while still holding onto the date. And there he remained, not wanting to give up the fresh date that he had in his hand in order to be freed from the jar. Eventually trappers came and captured the monkey still holding onto that date. Do you understand how this story applies to our discussion Brother?”

“I think I do. You are saying that our desires can trap us when they are stronger than our abilities to master them.”

“My, my Dear Brother. You are getting quite wise in your “old” age. I have found people far older than you who have not learned this lesson as they still follow their own desires before those of our Lord.”

“But now we must control our desires to remain here in conversation and return once again to our servitude and go back to our work.”

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