

Practicing In His Presence



Meditations on

*“The Practice of The Presence Of God”
with Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, OCD*

written by Paul Buis

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Introduction

Through many generations and across many genres of Christianity, **The Practice of the Presence of God** has inspired many to follow in the footsteps of **Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, OCD**. The practical and broad appeal of his teaching provides a solid foundation on which to build a fruitful spiritual life which flows from a font of continuous prayer.

Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection (1611-1691) served as a cook and a cobbler in the Paris community of the Discalced Carmelite friars. He joined the community in 1640, following a brief but failed stint in the French military. Awkward and simple by nature, he kept a lowly place throughout his stay in the monastery until his death in 1691. His letters and conversations are indicative of the profound depth of his experience of God throughout his spiritual life.

The presence of God reflected in nature was an important part of his inspiration: *“He told me that God had done him a singular favor, in his conversion at the age of eighteen. That in the winter, seeing a tree stripped of its leaves, and considering that within a little time, the leaves would be renewed, and after that the flowers and fruit appear, he received a high view of the providence and power of God, which has never since been effaced from his soul.”* (Br. Lawrence, First Conversation)

Let us follow in the footsteps of Brother Lawrence, through this garden of the Presence of God. Let us recall the promise which the Lord made to Moses at the start of his journey: *“He said, ‘My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest’.”* (Exodus 33.14)

First Meditation

“Then light shall rise for you in the darkness, and the gloom shall become for you like midday; then the Lord will guide you always and give you plenty even on the parched land. He will renew your strength, and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring whose water never fails.” (Isaiah 58.10b-11)

Tending His Garden

A walled garden, lush and serene,
She tends with a vigilant care:
The plants and shrubs are trim and clean;
No effort is too small to spare.

The weeds of judgements and grumblings,
And litter of her ego's ploys,
Would choke her space with dirty things
Take over all, and kill her joys.

In place of these, His Word she grows,
With gratitude and joyful praise;
Spaces of silence part the rows,
Which thrive with prayer in heaven's rays.

The walls of faith protect her space;
The nutrients of hope are feed;
The waters of love trickle grace --
The Kingdom she has grown from seed.

Both day and night, this space she tends;
On perseverance, she depends.

“That we should establish ourselves in a sense of God's presence, by continually conversing with Him. That it was a shameful thing to quit His conversation, to think of trifles and

fooleries... That we ought to give ourselves up to God, with regard both to things temporal and spiritual, and seek our satisfaction only in the fulfilling His will, whether He lead us by suffering or by consolation, for all would be equal to a soul truly resigned... That to arrive at such resignation as God requires, we should watch attentively over all the passions which mingle as well in spiritual things as those of a grosser nature: that God would give light concerning those passions to those who truly desire to serve Him.” (Br. Lawrence, First Conversation)

May we continually dwell in God's presence as we tend the inner garden He has entrusted to us.

Second Meditation

“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren... Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth...And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us.” (1 John 3.16,18,23-24)

Irrigation

For love, the Master Gardener,
Entrusted this space to her care:
He provides what is best for her;
She strives to serve with constant prayer.

This prayer envelopes all her tasks;
She works for Him who is all good.
Without regard for self, she asks,
For strength to serve Him as she should.

In success, she applauds His grace;
In failure, she begs for mercy.
Humility holds her in place
With ears to hear and eyes to see.

Love for Him is her sole motive,
In ev'ry moment of her days;
In forgetting her self, to live:
At His hand, for Him, in all ways.

In her space, irrigation flows;
Love nurtures all life as it grows.

“That he had always been governed by love, without selfish views; and that having resolved to make the love of God the end of all his actions, he had found reasons to be well satisfied with his method. That he was pleased when he could take up a straw from the ground for the love of God, seeking Him only, and nothing else, not even His gifts... That...the shortest way [was] to go straight to Him by a continual exercise of love, and doing all things for His sake...That our only business was to love and delight ourselves in God.” (Br. Lawrence, Second Conversation)

In our weaknesses, may the Master Gardener provide us with the means to serve Him with love nourished in constant prayer.

Third Meditation

“A strong city have we; he sets up walls and ramparts to protect us. Open up the gates to let in a nation that is just, one that keeps faith. A nation of firm purpose you keep in peace; in peace, for its trust in you.” Trust in the Lord forever! For the Lord is an eternal Rock...The way of the just

is smooth; the path of the just you make level. Yes, for your way and your judgements, O Lord, we look to you; Your name and your title are the desire of our souls. My soul yearns for you in the night, yes, my spirit within me keeps vigil for you.” (Isaiah 26.1-4,7-9a)

By Way of Trust

The walls of faith are foundation
For all that grows within her space;
Cast in concrete -- they're unshaken
By storms of doubt which could efface.

She trusts her Master in all ways;
He will not fail her nor mislead.
This confidence is the great praise
Of hearts who trust by word and deed.

For hearts of faith, His will is clear;
He provides all they need at hand.
In each action, the Master's near,
To guide her as the tasks demand.

She knows He provides what is best;
There is no cause for fear or flight.
No storm of great strength can arrest,
His grace that flows by day and night.

Her trust in Him is the sure way;
Without trust, all is disarray.

“He told me, that the foundation of the spiritual life in him had been a high notion and esteem of God in faith; which when he had once well conceived, he had no other care at first, but faithfully to reject every other thought, that he might perform all his actions for the love of God...That the trust we put in God honors Him much, and draws down great graces.

...That perfect resignation to God was a sure way to heaven, a way in which we had always sufficient light for our conduct... That there needed neither art nor science for going to God, but only a heart resolutely determined to apply itself to nothing but Him, or for His sake, and to love Him only.” (Br. Lawrence, Third Conversation)

May the Master provide us with the grace to trust in Him completely at all times, in all places and circumstances.

Fourth Meditation

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access (by faith) to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope, and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (Romans 5.1-5)

Nurtured By Hope

Hope nurtures, with His graces' might:
The roots to sink deep in the soil;
The shoots to stretch to heaven's height --
Hope is purpose for task and toil.

Hope helps her heart sink deep into
The truth of her reality;
She holds each task to see it through --
Serving Him with humility.

Hope stretches her heart to the height
Of her goal -- the Lord, who employs
So many means to lift her sight
To Him alone -- He's all her joys.

Through hope, worship becomes the way:
In spirit and truth, she can serve
Him, in all tasks, throughout each day,
With joy the hallmark of her verve.
He's the fulfilment of her soul;
All else is means to reach her Goal.

“That the whole substance of religion was faith, hope, and charity; by the practice of which we become united to the will of God: that all beside is indifferent and to be used as a means, that we may arrive at our end, and be swallowed up therein, by faith and charity. That all things are possible to him who believes, that they are less difficult to him who hopes, they are more easy to him who loves, and still more easy to him who perseveres in the practice of these three virtues...that, since his first coming to the monastery, he had considered God as the end of all his thoughts and desires, as the mark to which they should tend, and in which they should terminate. That the end we ought to propose to ourselves is to become, in this life, the most perfect worshippers of God we can possibly be, as we hope to be through all eternity.” (Br. Lawrence, Fourth Conversation)

May the Spirit instill a living and enduring hope in our hearts so that we may strive to reach the goal He has laid out before us.

Fifth Meditation

“I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect... Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.” (Romans 12.1-2,6-8)

Fragrant Offering

A fragrant offering she lifts
In little tasks that fill her days;
To make the best use of His gifts,
She offers them up as she prays:

"I lift these tasks which lay ahead
As offerings, Lord, to Your love.
Not by my strength -- may grace instead,
Provide the means drawn from above.

All that I am and have I yield
To Your purpose, for You alone.
May Your intentions be revealed,
That I may hold them as my own.

I thank You, Lord, for each success --
All praise be to Your holy Name!
In failures, I beg Your kindness,
To shield me from my guilt and shame."

Like fragrant blooms grown from small seeds,
His works of love bloom with her deeds.

“That our sanctification did not depend upon changing our works, but in doing that for God's sake, which we commonly do for our own. That it was lamentable to see how many people mistook the means for the end, addicting themselves to certain works, which they performed very imperfectly, by reason of their human or selfish regards...That the most excellent method he had found of going to God, was that of doing our common business without any view of pleasing men, and (as far as we are capable) purely for the love of God...That, when he began his business, he said to God, with a filial trust in Him, 'O my God, since You art with me, and I must now, in obedience to Your commands, apply my mind to these outward things, I beseech You to grant me the grace to continue in Your presence; and to this end do You prosper me with Your assistance, receive all my works, and possess all my affections.' As he proceeded in his work, he continued his familiar conversation with his Maker, imploring His grace, and offering to Him all his actions. When he had finished, he examined himself how he had discharged his duty; if he found well, he returned thanks to God; if otherwise, he asked pardon; and without being discouraged, he set his mind right again, and continued his exercise of the presence of God, as if he had never deviated from it. 'Thus,' said he, 'by rising after my falls, and by frequently renewed acts of faith and love, I am come to a state, wherein it would be as difficult for me not to think of God, as it was at first to accustom myself to it.’”
(Br. Lawrence, Fourth Conversation)

May the Lord always accept our little offerings and support them with an abundance of His grace, that our little efforts may become works of His love.

Sixth Meditation

“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.” (Matthew 11.28-30)

Her Lowly Place

Made of the flesh, so weak and frail,
She knows her low condition well:
Her efforts flawed and often fail;
Her sins only worthy of hell.

Why wonder, then, when others fall,
And fail to serve Him as they should?
Her own failures so often call --
She strives to always see the good.

Before His Perfect Majesty,
A lowly servant is her place:
Self-assurance is travesty --
She relies solely on His grace.

She knows the weak vessel's preferred,
For Love to flow over its brim;
And how quickly grace is procured,
By humble hearts who call on Him!

In serving, she seeks humble ways;
So ev'ry task's an act of praise.

“That we ought not to be weary of doing little things for the love of God, who regards not the greatness of the work, but the love with which it is performed... That when we enter upon the spiritual we should consider, and examine to the

bottom, what we are. And then we should find ourselves worthy of all contempt, and such as do not deserve the name of Christians, subject to all kinds of misery, and numberless accidents, which trouble us, and cause perpetual vicissitudes in our health, in our humors, in our internal and external dispositions: in fine, persons whom God would humble by many pains and labors, as well within as without. After this, we should not wonder that troubles, temptations, oppositions and contradictions, happen to us from men. We ought, on the contrary, to submit ourselves to them, and bear them as long as God pleases, as things highly advantageous to us...That the greater perfection a soul aspires after, the more dependent it is upon Divine grace.” (Br. Lawrence, Fourth Conversation)

May the Master, meek and humble of heart, teach us His ways, that we may become His humble servants.

Seventh Meditation

“I bless the Lord who counsels me; even at night my heart exhorts me. I keep the Lord always before me; with the Lord at my right, I shall never be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad, my soul rejoices; my body also dwells secure, You will show me the path to life, abounding joy in your presence, the delights at your right hand forever.” (Psalm 16.7-9,11)

Sacred State

By seeking Him in all things near;
His words, His ways ever in mind,
His omnipresence becomes clear:
A Father's love -- gentle and kind.

With heart-filled gratitude and praise,
Humility, and prudent care,
She fosters His love as she prays,
And charity flows from this prayer.

Prayer is, simply, His presence known;
A sacred state in which to dwell.
Each moment's laid before His throne,
As offering perpetual.

In His presence, love penetrates,
Faith lights the way, and hope lifts high;
Peace preserves and joy radiates --
Eternity and earth draw nigh.

His presence, filled with joy and grace,
In her soul, is His dwelling place.

“That we need only to recognize God intimately present with us, to address ourselves to Him every moment, that we may beg His assistance for knowing His will in things doubtful, and for rightly performing those which we plainly see He requires of us, offering them to Him before we do them, and giving Him thanks when we have done...That in this conversation with God, we are also employed in praising, adoring, and loving him incessantly, for His infinite goodness and perfection...That when he had thus in prayer filled his mind with great sentiments of that infinite Being, he went to his work appointed in the kitchen (for he was cook to the society); there having first considered severally the things his office required, and when and how each thing was to be done, he spent all the intervals of his time, as well before as after his work, in prayer...That his prayer was nothing else but a sense of the presence of God, his soul being at that time insensible to everything but Divine love: and that when the appointed times of prayer were past, he found no difference, because he still continued with God, praising and blessing Him with all his might, so that he passed his life in continual joy; yet hoped that God would give him somewhat to suffer, when he should grow stronger.... "The time of business," said he, "does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clutter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same

time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquillity as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament.” (Br. Lawrence, Fourth Conversation)

May the Lord draw us to dwell with joy in His presence in each moment of our day.

Eighth Meditation

“Then he said to all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?’” (Luke 9.23-25)

Entrusting All

He is the Master of her days
And nights -- He holds each thread of time.
Steadfast, eternal in His ways:
She rests on Him; her hope is prime.

He is the way; He leads her well.
He is the Truth; her trust is sure.
He is the Life: Emmanuel --
"God is with us" -- strong and secure.

She has surrendered all in trust
To Him, whom she strives to adhere.
Having left all behind as dust,
Her sight of His will is left clear.

The Lord of life and love and light;
What better master could there be?
He works with her to set things right;
She clings with great humility.

His ways govern her first recall;
His Holy Presence is her all.

“He told me, that all consists in one hearty renunciation of everything which we are sensible does not lead to God;... That we ought, once for all, heartily to put our whole trust in God, and make a total surrender of ourselves to Him, secure that He would not deceive us...Having found in many books different methods of going to God, and diverse practices of the spiritual life, I thought this would serve rather to puzzle me, than facilitate what I sought after, which was nothing but how to become wholly God's. This made me resolve to give the all for the All: so after having given myself wholly to God, to make all the satisfaction I could for my sins, I renounced, for the love of Him, everything that was not He; and I began to live as if there was none but He and I in the world. Sometimes I considered myself before Him as a poor criminal at the feet of his judge; at other times I beheld Him in my heart as my Father, as my God.” (Br. Lawrence, First Letter)

May the Master guide our hearts to trust in Him completely and to yield to His will without reserve.

Ninth Meditation

“He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6.8)

At His Side

With love, the Master Gardener,
Leads His apprentice through her tasks.
With kind forbearance, He guides her --
Knowing her needs before she asks.

She looks to Him with great regard:
A child at her Father's side;
To please Him -- her greatest reward --
Her heart with His big heart abide.

With signals of the heart, she knows
Her next step in the task at hand.
With gentle patience, He bestows
His guidance -- she yearns His command.

She walks one step behind His stride;
She skips His footprints freshly laid
Like hopscotch -- she stays at His side:
Such is their life-long promenade.

Her attention is His alone;
His is the only way she's known.

“I walk before God simply, in faith, with humility and with love; and I apply myself diligently to do nothing and think nothing which may displease Him. I hope that when I have done what I can, He will do with me what He pleases... And I make it my business only to persevere in His holy presence, wherein I keep myself by a simple attention, and a general fond regard to God, which I may call an actual presence of God; or, to speak better, an habitual, silent, and secret conversation of the soul with God... This King, full of mercy and goodness, very far from chastising me, embraces me with love, makes me eat at His table, serves me with His own hands, gives me the key of His treasures; He converses and delights Himself with me incessantly... My most usual method is this simple attention, and such a general passionate regard to God; to whom I find myself often attached with greater sweetness and delight than that of an infant at the mother's breast: so that if I dare use the expression, I should choose to call this state the bosom of God, for the inexpressible

sweetness which I taste and experience there.” (Br. Lawrence, Second Letter)

May our loving Father smile down at us as we skip beside Him each step of the way.

Tenth Meditation

“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again, and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he finds a pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it.” (Matthew 13.44-46)

Inheritance

Her Father holds a treasure trove,
Of wealth He longs to have outpoured:
Embodied in His Son -- His love
and life -- are so often ignored.

The toils of her vain pursuits
Preoccupied her heart, blocking
The flow of grace -- withered its fruits --
His Son could not be heard knocking.

Without Him, all pursuits are vain;
In Him, all life and love are found.
She holds her old ways in disdain,
That by His grace, life may abound.

As steward of her heart, she keeps
His presence with the utmost care:
Her sentinel watches through sleeps;
She strives to live unbroken prayer.

His kingdom of riches is found
In Presence treasured without bound.

“He complains much of our blindness; and cries often that we are to be pitied who content ourselves with so little. God, says he, has infinite treasure to bestow, and we take up with a little sensible devotion which passes in a moment. Blind as we are, we hinder God, and stop the current of His graces. But when He finds a soul penetrated with a lively faith, He pours into it His graces and favors plentifully; there they flow like a torrent, which, after being forcibly stopped against its ordinary course, when it has found a passage, spreads itself with impetuosity and abundance. Yes, we often stop this torrent, by the little value we set upon it. But let us stop it no more: let us enter into ourselves and break down the bank which hinders it. Let us make way for grace; let us redeem the lost time, for perhaps we have but little left; ... not to advance, in the spiritual life, is to go back. But those who have the gale of the Holy Spirit go forward even in sleep.” (Br. Lawrence, Fourth Letter)

May the preciousness of His Presence be always treasured in our hearts.

Eleventh Meditation

“With all my heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commands. In my heart I treasure your promise, that I may not sin against you...I find joy in the way of your decrees more than in all riches. I will ponder your precepts and consider your paths. In your laws I take delight; I will never forget your word...At all times my soul is stirred with longing for your edicts.” (Psalm 119.10,11,14-16,20)

Unencumbered

The heart cluttered with many things
Leaves His presence with little space;
The throne room of the King of kings
Should be kept pristine for His grace.

Attachments of the heart entwine
Her garden, binding all that grows.
Tenaciously, these vines malign
His presence and His grace's flows.

She resolves to strip her heart bare:
To rid her garden of these weeds;
To clear the underbrush with care --
That she may follow where He leads.

The heart held free for Him alone,
Can serve Him at His beck and call;
With purity, before His throne,
She attends to Him with her all.

Attendants serve wholeheartedly,
With strength and joy that flow freely.

“I know that for the right practice of it, the heart must be empty of all other things; because God will possess the heart alone; and as He cannot possess it alone, without emptying it of all besides, so neither can He act there, and do in it what He pleases, unless it be left vacant to Him... it is not pleasure which we ought to seek in this exercise; but let us do it from a principle of love, and because God would have us...Ah! knew we but the want we have of the grace and assistance of God, we should never lose sight of Him, no, not for a moment. Believe me; make immediately a holy and firm resolution never more willfully to forget Him, and to spend the rest of your days in His sacred presence, deprived for the love of Him, if He thinks fit, of all consolations. Set heartily about

this work, and if you do it as you ought, be assured that you will soon find the effects of it.” (Br. Lawrence, Fifth Letter)

May the Lord grant us grace and strength to set our hearts free so that we may serve Him wholeheartedly.

Twelfth Meditation

“Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer.”
(Romans 12.12)

The Hungry Hive

Darting about like wanton bees:
Nectar-laden, yet seeking more,
From bloom to bloom among the trees --
Her wayward thoughts make prayer a chore.

In early spring, the bees are strewn;
The blooms beckon a hungry hive.
How can her heart and mind attune?
Will recollection e'er arrive?

In late fall, when the hive is full,
The bees settle within their place;
The hive is set -- heavy and dull --
A mind at rest is filled with grace.

The north breeze chills the autumn air,
As wayward bees return to base;
Her heart returns when called to prayer,
To feed and be set in its place.

His graces still her mind's churning;
His love fulfills her heart's yearning.

“You tell me nothing new: you are not the only one that is troubled with wandering thoughts. Our mind is extremely roving; but as the will is mistress of all our faculties, she must recall them, and carry them to God, as their last end. When the mind, for want of being sufficiently reduced by recollection, at our first engaging in devotion, has contracted certain bad habits of wandering and dissipation, they are difficult to overcome, and commonly draw us, even against our wills, to the things of the earth. I believe one remedy for this is, to confess our faults, and to humble ourselves before God. I do not advise you to use multiplicity of words in prayer; many words and long discourses being often the occasions of wandering: hold yourself in prayer before God, like a dumb or paralytic beggar at a rich man's gate: let it be your business to keep your mind in the presence of the Lord. If it sometimes wander, and withdraw itself from Him, do not much disquiet yourself for that; trouble and disquiet serve rather to distract the mind, than to re-collect it; the will must bring it back in tranquillity; if you persevere in this manner, God will have pity on you. One way to re-collect the mind easily in the time of prayer, and preserve it more in tranquillity, is not to let it wander too far at other times: you should keep it strictly in the presence of God; and being accustomed to think of Him often, you will find it easy to keep your mind calm in the time of prayer, or at least to recall it from its wanderings.” (Br. Lawrence, Eighth Letter)

May the Lord gather our wayward thoughts with His grace and feed our hungry hearts with His love.

Thirteenth Meditation

“Thus says the Lord: The heavens are my throne, the earth is my footstool. What kind of house can you build for me; what is to be my resting place? My hand made all these things

when all of them came to be, says the Lord. This is the one whom I approve: the lowly and afflicted man who trembles at my word.” (Isaiah 66.1-2)

The Oratory

An oratory's built for prayer,
Within the center of her soul;
She returns to Him often there,
That Love may dwell with love made whole.

To go to Him, there is no need
For pilgrimages far and wide,
Or devotions which may impede --
These are but means best left outside.

With what humble patience He waits
For her to hear His gentle call!
She turns within, when noise abates,
To be with Him who is her All.

Her mind is pacified and clear;
Her soul's attuned to Spirit's flow;
Her heart is stilled, open to hear:
Him speak gently with heart aglow.

His presence beats tranquillity
Within her heart's oratory.

“For my part I keep myself retired with Him in the depth of center of my soul as much as I can; and while I am so with Him I fear nothing; but the least turning from Him is insupportable ...It is, however, necessary to put our whole trust in God, laying aside all other cares, and even some particular forms of devotion, though very good in themselves, yet such as one often engages in unreasonably: because those devotions are only means to attain to the end; so when by this

exercise of the presence of God we are with Him who is our end, it is then useless to return to the means; but we may continue with Him our commerce of love, persevering in His holy presence... You need not cry very loud; He is nearer to us than we are aware of. It is not necessary for being with God to be always at church; we may make an oratory of our heart, wherein to retire from time to time, to converse with Him in meekness, humility, and love. Every one is capable of such familiar conversation with God, some more, some less: He knows what we can do. Let us begin then; perhaps He expects but one generous resolution on our part. Have courage.” (Br. Lawrence, Sixth Letter, Seventh Letter)

May the Spirit establish His oratory deep within us, that we may retire with Him in His presence as often as we are called.

Fourteenth Meditation

“More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.”
(Romans 5.3-5)

Tempered Heart

The untrained heart will flee from pain:
Its instincts of pleasure and fear,
Abhor suffering with disdain --
Wailing with grief when clouds draw near.

The tempered heart, steadied and still,
Absorbs the pain with forbearing;
Love's response is an act of will
Which does not shirk at suffering.

As butter yields beneath the knife
Or rock withstands the chisel's blow,
The heart's response to pain is rife
With purpose or fatalist woe.

His purpose uses even pain,
To draw us to Himself in love;
As plants beaten with heavy rain,
Hearts that drink deep will rise above.

Take heart and hope in suffering;
His love absorbs our offering.

“I do not pray that you may be delivered from your pains; but I pray God earnestly that He would give you strength and patience to bear them as long as He pleases. Comfort yourself with Him who holds you fastened to the cross: He will loose you when He thinks fit. Happy those who suffer with Him: accustom yourself to suffer in that manner, and seek from Him the strength to endure as much, and as long, as He shall judge to be necessary for you... those who consider sickness as coming from the hand of God, as the effects of His mercy, and the means which He employs for their salvation, commonly find in it great sweetness and sensible consolation.... When pains come from God, He only can cure them. He often sends diseases of the body, to cure those of the soul. Comfort yourself with the sovereign Physician both of soul and body...If we were well accustomed to the exercise of the presence of God, all bodily diseases would be much alleviated thereby. God often permits that we should suffer a little, to purify our souls, and oblige us to continue with Him. Take courage, offer Him your pains incessantly, pray to Him for strength to endure them. Above all, get a habit of entertaining yourself often with God, and forget Him the least you can. Adore Him in your infirmities, offer yourself to Him from time

to time; and, in the height of your sufferings, beseech Him humbly and affectionately (as a child his father) to make you conformable to His holy will....I am in pain to see you suffer so long; what gives me some ease, and sweetens the feeling I have of your griefs, is that they are proofs of God's love towards you: see them in that view, and you will bear them more easily... Love sweetens pains; and when one loves God, one suffers for His sake with joy and courage. Do you so, I beseech you; comfort yourself with Him, who is the only Physician of all our maladies. He is the Father of the afflicted, always ready to help us. He loves us infinitely more than we imagine: love Him then, and seek not consolation elsewhere: I hope you will soon receive it. Adieu.” (Br. Lawrence, Eleventh Letter, Twelfth Letter, Thirteenth Letter)

May the Divine Physician provide hope and courage for our hearts as we surrender ourselves with confidence and trust to His loving care.

Fifteenth Meditation

“Set your heart right and be steadfast, and do not be hasty in time of calamity. Cleave to him and do not depart, that you may be honored at the end of your life. Accept whatever is brought upon you, and in changes that humble you be patient. For gold is tested in the fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation. Trust in him, and he will help you; make your ways straight, and hope in him. You who fear the Lord, wait for his mercy; and turn not aside, lest you fall. You who fear the Lord, trust in him, and your reward will not fail; you who fear the Lord, hope for good things, for everlasting joy and mercy.” (Sirach 2.2-9)

Equanimity

Pure bliss, like too much sun, can burn
Her heart, leaving it scorched and dry;
Distress, like biting wind, can churn
Her heart, leaving it raw and wry.

The humble heart, centered with peace,
Shields itself from the sun and wind.
Secured by hope that storms will cease,
It holds until extremes rescind.

The presence of God is constant,
In the chaotic churn of life:
To enemies, it's resistant;
With love, it harbors peace, not strife.

In His presence, her heart is stilled;
Unmoved by neither praise nor scorn.
With strength of His love, she is filled,
To serve Him with joy, not forlorn.

Be there bliss or calamity,
She strives for equanimity.

“I have been often near expiring, though I was never so much satisfied as then. Accordingly I did not pray for any relief, but I prayed for strength to suffer with courage, humility, and love. Ah, how sweet is it to suffer with God! However great the sufferings may be, receive them with love. 'Tis paradise to suffer and be with Him...God knows best what is needful for us, and all that He does is for our good. If we knew how much He loves us, we should be always ready to receive equally and with indifference from His hand the sweet and the bitter; all would please that came from Him. The sorest afflictions never appear intolerable, but when we see them in the wrong light.

When we see them in the hand of God, who dispenses them: when we know that it is our loving Father, who abases and distresses us: our sufferings will lose their bitterness, and become even matter of consolation. Let all our employment be to know God: the more one knows Him, the more one desires to know Him. And as knowledge is commonly the measure of love, the deeper and more extensive our knowledge shall be, the greater will be our love: and if our love of God were great we should love Him equally in pains and pleasures... Let us begin to be devoted to Him in good earnest. Let us cast everything besides out of our hearts; He would possess them alone. Beg this favor of Him. If we do what we can on our parts, we shall soon see that change wrought in us which we aspire after...I hope from His mercy the favor to see Him within a few days. [He took to his bed two days after and died within the week.]” (Br. Lawrence, Fourteenth Letter, Fifteenth Letter)

May the presence of God steady our hearts with the strength of His love and the shelter of His peace.

References

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