



LAY CARMELITES
ONTARIO AND NORTH WEST NEW YORK 1995 - 2020

RETREAT HANDBOOK

THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD



25TH ANNUAL RETREAT

FR. NICHOLAS BLACKWELL, O.CARM

FRIDAY, 2ND OCTOBER – SATURDAY 3RD OCTOBER

This handbook has been lovingly prepared by the Lay Carmelite Retreat Team of the Ontario and NW New York Region of the Province of The Most Pure Heart of Mary.

Introduction:

<https://carmelitesofboston.org/spirit-of-carmel/our-saints/brother-lawrence-of-resurrection/>

Maxims:

<http://theythoughtforthemselves.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/PracticeofthePresenceofGod.pdf>

Letters:

<https://d2y1pz2y630308.cloudfront.net/15471/documents/2016/10/Brother%20Lawrence-The%20Practice%20of%20the%20Presence%20of%20God.pdf>

Rule of Albert:

<http://www.carmelites.ie/Rule.pdf>

Front Cover: Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada

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**“... You are to gather
daily in the morning
for Mass, where this is
convenient.”**

par. #14 of The Rule of
St. Albert of Jerusalem



National Shrine of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Middletown,
New York on the feast of All Carmelite Souls

FR. NICHOLAS BLACKWELL, O.CARM.



Fr. Nicholas Blackwell is a Carmelite friar. He was born and raised in rural Michigan. Fr. Nicholas was ordained at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Middletown, New York in 2017. He now lives and ministers in New York.

Fr. Blackwell received a bachelor's degree in history from Northern Michigan University and his Master of Divinity degree from The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., where he was involved with the Catholic Campus Ministry. He served in Gambia with the Peace Corps for one year after college. He is currently the Parochial Vicar at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish, Middletown, NY and is a member of the St. Elias Province. In addition to his responsibilities, Fr. Nicholas is also studying Canon Law at The Catholic University of America. He is also the Associate Vocation Director and has been published in magazines like OSV The Priest.

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RETREAT SCHEDULE

FRIDAY, 2ND OCTOBER – SATURDAY, 3RD OCTOBER 2020

DAY	* TIME	
Friday	7:00 pm	Opening Prayer and Welcome
	7:10 pm	‘Navigating Zoom’
	7:30 pm	1st Presentation
	8:05 pm	Q&A
	8:15 pm	Small group discussion
	8:45 pm	Sharing from group discussion
	9:05 pm	Closing Prayer and Blessing
Saturday	10:00 am	Opening Prayer and Welcome
	10:05 am	2nd Presentation
	10:40 am	Q&A
	10:50 am	Small group discussion
	11:20 am	Sharing from group discussion
	11:40 am	30 - Minute Break
	12:10 am	3rd Presentation
	12:45 pm	Q&A
	12:55 pm	Small group discussion
	1:25 pm	Sharing from group discussion
	1:45 pm	30 - Minute Break
	2:15 pm	4th Presentation
	2:45 pm	Q&A
	2:55 pm	Small group discussion
	3:25 pm	Q&A and Whole Group Sharing
	4:00 pm	Closing Remarks, Prayer and Blessing

* Times subject to change



**“... To Adore God in truth
is to recognize Him for
what He is and ourselves
for what we are.”**

Maxim #16 from
Br. Lawrence of the Resurrection



THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

OUR CALL TO COMMUNION: THE FOUNDATION OF HIS PRESENCE

1) Introduction

a) Intimacy (A Guiding Way for Our Weekend)

i) Words Matter!

(1) **Intimare**

(a) To relate & recount. A relationship between two things.

(2) **Intimatus**

(a) Inmost, innermost, deepest (adj.). The inner recesses of a person

2) Part 1 of the foundation for our next 2 days

a) The Rule of St. Albert par. #11 [14]

i) An *oratory* should be built as conveniently as possible among the cells. If it can be done *without difficulty*, you are to gather each morning *to hear Mass*.

b) The Oratory

i) A Place relating to prayer that has a sense of privateness that is still open to receive another.

ii) Our heart is that place for us Carmelites.

(1) Our places and world around us are thus in relationship to it.

(2) It is also a place that we cultivate via the cultivation of the world around us. There is a connectedness that must be honored.

iii) Community – We are not ‘islands’ but more akin to bees; what we make impacts those around us, even when we pray privately in our hearts.

c) Without difficulty

i) Healthy Perspectives – What barriers am I putting up that keeps me from entering or journeying in the oratory that is my heart?

ii) ‘Shoulds / Oughts’ – Be careful of the sentiments these words can cultivate; they are doorways where envy can enter through.

iii) Self-suspicion – We are all sinners, and none of us can know everything there is to know about the things in our lives.



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- (1) Questing motives and intentions are necessary but need to be done in the line of Christ. Why? So, we do not fall into condemnation but instead, journey into revelation.

- iv) Self-Knowledge – The former leads to this necessary and latter point. We are meant to know ourselves because knowledge is a means for the growth of love.
 - (1) Remember, we are called to love ourselves. We are all loveable.

- d) *To Hear Mass*
 - i) To hear – Mass is not just about getting something; it is about being with someone.
 - (1) Our ears are meant to receive him just like our hands and mouths are.
 - (2) God speaks to us at every Mass, so what makes us deaf to his voice?

- 3) He in I and I in He
 - (1) Mass is a moment of jubilation, that is why we offer praise, not from sorrow but gratitude.
 - (2) So, it is like a dance where the bride and the bridegroom gazes meet.
 - (3) The “I” of course, is the Church, which we are in the Spirit.



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OUR CALL TO COMMUNION

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSIONS

1. Share two points that captured your attention.
What significance do these points have in your spiritual journey?
2. Reflect and share how you relate to
 - a. Yourself.
Do you truly believe you are the Temple of the 'Holy Spirit'?
Is there anything that holds you back?
What steps could you take to realise the Spirit of God lives in you?
 - b. Family and neighbours.
Do you see Christ in all people around you, particularly close family or those whom you know well?
Is there anything that holds you back?
What steps could you take to see Christ in all those around you?
 - c. Your environment
What is your relationship to the earth, to animals, to food, etc?
Is there anything that holds you back?
What steps could you take to 'see' God's work in all of His creation?
 - d. God
How is your relationship in points a, b & c reflected in your relationship to God?
What steps could you take to deepen your relationship with God?
3. How can you enrich your personal experience of the Holy Mass, and deepen your relationship with God?



THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

TO ADORE: A NEEDED MOVEMENT FOR OUR LIVES

1) Part 2 of the Foundation of the Weekend

a) Adoratio

- (1) The act of religion by which God is recognized as alone worthy of supreme honor because He who is infinitely perfect has supreme dominion over humans and the right to human total dependence on the Creator. It is at once an act of mind and will, expressing itself in appropriate prayers, postures of praise, and acts of reverence and sacrifice. (Fr. John Hardon, S.J.)
- (2) Ad + orare – To Prayer – Adoration again is a movement of the whole self to the one who calls it and is worthy of it.
- (3) Therefore, all things must be rooted in God.
- (4) To – beg, ask for is thus a fundamental aspect of those movements because, without the aid of the one who calls, the journey will be too much for us.
- (5) *Where has your beloved gone, O fairest among women? Which way has your beloved turned, that we may seek Him with you? My beloved has gone down to His garden, to the beds of spices, to pasture His flock in the gardens, and to gather lilies. I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine; He pastures His flock among the lilies. ~ Song of Songs:1-3*

2) How are we able to Adore?

- a) To Adore, God is not a mere sentimental pleasantry of the heart. It is possible because a relationship between two hearts that was and is being formed.
 - i) Baptism – We are those that are formed to be like Christ. How? Because we died and are risen in him through our baptism.
 - (1) CCC 265: *By the grace of Baptism "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit", we are called to **share** in the life of the Blessed Trinity, here on earth in the obscurity of faith, and after death in eternal light (cf. Paul VI, CPG # 9).*



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ii) Faith (The Beginning of Eternal Life)

(1) CCC 163 – *Faith makes us taste in advance the light of the beatific vision, the goal of our journey here below. Then we shall see God "face to face," "as He is." So faith is already the beginning of eternal life: When we contemplate the blessings of faith even now as if gazing at a reflection in a mirror, it is as if we already possessed the wonderful things which our faith assures us we shall one day enjoy.* (1 Cor 13:12; 1 Jn 3:2, St. Basil, St. Thomas Aquinas).

3) **The Purpose of the Presence of God**

i) We must keep our eyes fixed on God in everything we say, do, or undertake. ~ Maxim 2

ii) **Our goal** is to be the most perfect adorers of God in this life, as we hope to be throughout all eternity. ~ Maxim 2 cont'd.

iii) A soul depends on grace in proportion to its desire for greater perfection. ~ Maxim 5

(1) Perfection – To be understood through the wholeness of our being. We will lack nothing that our being needs as we grow in our desire of God. He will satisfy this desire for him that he has placed within us.

iv) What comforts me in this life is that I see God by Faith. ~ Letter 11 (#6)

(1) Adoration is the means that brings us from blindness into sight. The means being the gift of faith, hope, and love.

v) CCC 2095 - The theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity inform and give life to the moral virtues. Thus, charity leads us to render to God what we as creatures owe him in all justice. **The virtue of religion** disposes us to have this **attitude**. [Phil. 2:5]

vi) Him Only Shall You Serve CCC 2096-2097

(1) *Adoration is the first act of the virtue of religion. To adore God is to acknowledge Him as God, as the Creator and Savior, the Lord and Master of everything that exists, as infinite and merciful Love. "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve," says Jesus, citing Deuteronomy.*



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(2) *To adore God is to acknowledge, in respect and absolute submission, the "nothingness of the creature" who would not exist but for God. To adore God is to praise and exalt Him and to humble oneself, as Mary did in the Magnificat, confessing with gratitude that He has done great things and Holy is His name. The worship of the one God sets man free from turning in on himself, from the slavery of sin and the idolatry of the world.*

b) To worship

i) homo religious

(1) Why is this all-important – Because we are fundamentally religious beings. We were made for worship; that is how we are fulfilled and brought into perfection.

(a) (Mircea Eliade & Karen Armstrong are a few writers on this topic. I share this information so you may know the sources of this perspective.)

ii) Idols (a source of blindness) – When the right religion is built on the virtue and it is not honored, there will not remain an empty void, but something will fill it. What is that something, idols.

(1) *Therefore, there will be a visitation also upon the heathen idols, because, though part of what God created, they became an abomination, Snares for human souls and a trap for the feet of the foolish. For the idea of making idols was the beginning of fornication, and the invention of them was the corruption of life; for they did not exist from the beginning, nor will they last forever. For through human vanity they entered the world, and therefore their speedy end has been planned. ~ Wisdom 14: 11-14*



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TO ADORE: A NEEDED MOVEMENT FOR OUR LIVES

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSIONS

1. Share two points that captured your attention.
What significance do these points have in your spiritual journey?
2. Review and share maxim 2 or 5
 - a. Your understanding of the maxim.
NB: as you explore the maxims in your life, there is no right or wrong answer. The insight from one person helps to enrich others in their experience and understanding.
 - b. Maxim 2 - What actions could you take to become perfect Adorers of God?
and / or
Maxim 5 – What actions could you take to ‘let go’ and allow yourself to be dependant on the Grace of God?
3. Definition:
Idol - any person or thing regarded with blind admiration, adoration, or devotion, a deep attachment to a cause, a person, etc.
Being insightfully authentic and honest with yourself, what are your idols?
During this lockdown, much has been taken from us, some freedom of choice, lifestyles, etc. what was your initial reaction? How did you respond? Did you become aware of any attachments, e.g. to ideas or concepts?
What steps can you take to ‘let go’ and trust completely in God?



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HOW TO BE ADORERS OF GOD

1) Addressing the Heart, Our Oratory

i) *The First means Is great purity of heart.* ~ Maxim #17

(a) Not a surprise, think of the beginning of the Rule!

ii) A Scriptural Insight to being an Adorer: God acts first!

(a) *1 Jn 3: 19-20 - ... and by this, we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.*

(i) In our Heart, God is first!

(b) *Rev. 2:13 - ... And all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve.*

(i) God is moving in our hearts, and from his action, a response is being called for from us.

(c) *James 4:8 - Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

(i) Our hearts' eyes can become focused on other sources that do not yield life; they give us a double vision. God is calling us to be focused.

(d) *1 Thes. 3: 13 - And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.*

(i) Avoid sin.

(ii) He strengthens us when we stay committed to his way of holiness made known to us by Christ and the Saints. That is why we must know our faith! Ignorance is a breeding ground for sin.

2) We need to address our Weeds

(1) *How? In Charity and Truth.*

(i) "... that our only concern in this life is to please God and that everything else is folly and vanity ... renounce completely for the sake of his love all that is not God..." Letter 9 (#2)



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a. Before we act, do we ask ourselves, as Adorers of God, will this please him? Will this focus me on Him?

ii) The intention of the Heart

(a) An argument arose among them as to which one of them was the greatest. But Jesus, aware of their intentions... ~ Luke 9: 46-47a

(b) Focus – comes from an ancient view of hearth or fireplace. It was a place of convergence. So, again in our heart is our place of convergence that we Catholics understand as communion.

(i) *Mt 15:19 -- For **out** of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.*

(ii) *Heb 4:12 -- Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it can judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

(c) “Be satisfied with the condition in which GOD places you: however happy you may think me ...”. ~ Letter 11 (#5)

(i) The Grass is always greener mindset is quite dangerous for us who strive to be in God's presence via Adoration.

(ii) It takes us out of communion, of that place of convergence, and places us in an illusion of what might be or could be. It works against the truth of reality.

3) **Chapter 6 of Br. Lawrence’s Maxims**

a) #17 previous mentioned (start of conference)

b) #18-19: Fidelity: to cultivate our awareness of God’s presence in our lives.

c) #20: Works of memory to shape our acts of awareness. Place in our minds phrases and verses that impact the heart that a person can return to through the day, several times an hour.

d) #21: do not judge yourself in the simple ways that we begin this practice. The key is always to recall the loving view of God.

i) (this is where the should / oughts can mislead us)

e) #22: Address the senses (mortification). We cannot give ourselves the satisfaction that our hearts yearn for in this world.



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HOW TO BE ADORERS OF GOD

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSIONS

1. Share two points that captured your attention.
What significance do these points have in your spiritual journey?
2. Consider one thing in your daily routine that takes you away from God and does not please Him?
What actions can you take to eliminate or modify that behaviour or action to draw you closer to God and please Him?
3. If you would like to cultivate a deeper awareness of God, what actions could you take? This could include
 - Starting a monthly, weekly or daily meditation.
NB: Take 'baby steps', do not change your routine abruptly!
 - Having a 'Prayer Buddy' you could practice and share experiences with.
 - Join a monthly, weekly or daily Lectio Divina group ... or start one yourself.



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LET US NOT SETTLE

1) Being a Pilgrim

a) CCC 1419: *Having passed from this world to the Father, Christ gives us in the Eucharist the pledge of glory with him. Participation in the Holy Sacrifice identifies us with his Heart, sustains our strength along the pilgrimage of this life, makes us long for eternal life, and unites us even now to the Church in heaven, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and all the saints.*

i) Phil. 3: 20 - *But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.*

ii) John 18: 36 - *Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. However, as it is, my kingdom is not from here."*

(1) Be careful of Kingdom building, and it can easily become another endeavor of Babel.

iii) Letter 15 (#3): "Let us not settle for seeking or loving God only for the graces he has given or can give us, no matter how great they may be."

(1) God gives gifts to encourage us and strengthen us along the way, not to be complacent.

iv) God is not a genie. He calls us to be with him and like him. Consolations can be a dangerous temptation because we can become pacified by them, as St. Teresa reminds us in her work the Interior Castle.

2) To Evangelize

a) The letters show us the willingness of Br. Lawrence to share what he has received from Christ that he helped to shape during his life. He did not leave this treasure locked up and hidden away.

b) Why do we have these days?



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i) *Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses. ~Pope Saint Paul VI*

c) From Our Tradition

i) We must all try to be preachers through our deeds. ~ *Saint Teresa of Ávila (chapter 15, The Way of Perfection)*

ii) They who want to win the world for Christ must have the courage to come into conflict with it. ~ *Blessed Titus Brandsma*

iii) CCC 2709 - What is contemplative prayer? St. Teresa answers: "*Contemplative prayer [oracion mental] in my opinion is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us.*" Contemplative prayer seeks him "whom my soul loves." It is Jesus, and in him, the Father. We seek him because to desire him is always the beginning of love, and we seek him in that pure faith, which causes us to be born of him and to live in him. In this inner prayer, we can still meditate, but our attention is fixed on the Lord himself.

iv)

(1) We seek Christ through Adoration that is not merely relegated to a Church but in a world also where Christ lies in the heart of people who remain dormant to him.



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LET US NOT SETTLE

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSIONS

1. Share two points that captured your attention.
What significance do these points have in your spiritual journey?
2. Reflect and share on Br. Lawrence's words:
'Let us not settle for seeking or loving God only for the graces He has given or can give us, no matter how great they may be. These favours, impressive as they are, never bring us as close to Him as does a simple act of faith; let us seek Him often through this virtue. He is in our midst; let us not look for Him elsewhere.'
Letter 15
3. What daily actions can we take to be a witness to God's Kingdom?
NB: Be aware of the small simple actions that can be taken.



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INTRODUCTION TO BROTHER LAWRENCE

BROTHER LAWRENCE OF THE RESURRECTION (1614-1691)

Nicholas Herman was born at Herimenil, in Lorraine, France in 1614.

Recollections by Fr. Joseph de Beaufort whom Brother Lawrence spiritually directed. "I saw Brother Lawrence for the first time, and he told me that God had granted him a special grace of conversion at the age of eighteen when he was still in the world. One day in winter while he was looking at a tree stripped of its leaves, and he realized that in a little while its leaves would reappear, followed by its flowers and fruit, he received a profound insight into God's providence that has never been erased from his soul. This insight completely freed him from the world and gave him such a love for God that he could not say it had increased during the more than forty years that had passed." - First Conversation August 3, 1666

1633 - Military Service - 30 Years War

Excerpt from Eulogy given by Fr. Joseph de Beaufort, his biographer. "He was taken prisoner by German troops on the march and was treated like a spy. The extent of his patience and tranquillity under these terrible circumstances cannot be imagined. They even threatened to hang him. He fearlessly answered that he was not what they suspected. He viewed death with indifference, because his conscience reproached him for no crime. When the soldiers saw his courage, they released him. The Swedes entered Lorraine, and while passing through the area attacked the little town of Rambervillers where our young soldier became wounded leaving him permanently lame."

Footman to the Treasurer of the King of France

Excerpt from Eulogy given by Fr. Joseph de Beaufort, his biographer. "After a period of convalescence in his parent's home, he entered the employment of William de Fuibert, treasurer to the king of France. Serving as a footman, Lawrence describes himself as 'a great awkward fellow who broke everything'."

June 1640 - Enters Religious Life

Counselled by his Uncle Jean, a Discalced Carmelite Lay Brother, enters Carmel "He often relived the perils of military service...and was only after intense reflection, inner struggles, sighs and tears that he firmly resolved to devote himself to the practice of the Gospel and follow in the footsteps of his uncle, a holy Discalced Carmelite. In mid-June, at the age of twenty-six, he entered the Order of Discalced Carmelites on the Rue Vaugirard in Paris, as a lay brother."
-Eulogy



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Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection

“On August 14, 1640 Nicholas Herman received the brown Carmelite habit and took the religious name of Lawrence completing it with the title ‘of the Resurrection’ a mystery he admirably lived in the sight of the living God and his Christ. ...He entered fearing ‘they would skin him alive’ for his awkwardness and faults - as he said in his own unpolished language, often seasoned with humour-but fortunately for himself and his brothers ‘he experienced only satisfaction’.” - Third Conversation November 22, 1666

His Spirituality

Brother Lawrence An answer to a Friar’s question on The Practice of the Presence of God “From the moment I entered religious life, I considered God to be the goal and end of all my soul’s thoughts and affections. At the beginning of my novitiate, during the hours consecrated to mental prayer, I spent my time learning to appreciate the Truth of this divine Being, more so by the light of faith than by the work of meditation and discourse. By this short and sure means I advanced in the knowledge of (God) with whom I resolved to remain forever...” - Eulogy

Love of God

Brother Lawrence “In the ways of God thoughts amount to little whereas love accounts for everything...I flip my little omelette in the frying pan for the love of God, and when it’s done, if I have nothing to do, I prostrate myself on the floor and adore my God who gave me the grace to do it, after which I get up happier than a king . Our sanctification depends not on changing our works, but on doing for God what we would normally do for ourselves.” - Ways of Brother Lawrence

Work and prayer the same

“The times of activity are not at all different from the hours of prayer, for I possess God as peacefully in the commotion of my kitchen, where often people are asking me for different things at the same time, as I do when kneeling in front of the Blessed Sacrament.”

A Monastery Cook for Thirty years - Brother Lawrence

“...He had a strong aversion to cooking...” “When I began my work I said to God with filial trust: ‘My God, since you are with me, and since I must apply myself to these duties by your order, I beg you to give me the grace to remain with you and keep you company. Even better, my Lord, work with me, accept my efforts and take possession of all my affections.’ Thus during my work, I continued to speak intimately with him, offering him my services, asking him for his graces.” - Ways of Brother Lawrence

1665 - Monastery Sandal maker and Wine Buyer

Brother Lawrence becomes better known and esteemed: “He carried out this office of cook... until providence ordained otherwise. His leg became ulcerated, so his superiors had to assign him to an easier task...as sandal maker, after suffering from ‘a kind of sciatic gout that worsened



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as the years went by. Gradually, the influence of the humble sandal-maker grew, not only among the poor. Many learned people, religious and ecclesiastics had esteem for him as well...Fenelon among them. - Eulogy

Brother Lawrence's Virtues

Father de Beaufort recalls. "He was open, eliciting confidence, letting you feel you could tell him anything ...Once you got past the rough exterior you discovered unusual wisdom, a freedom beyond the reach of the ordinary lay brother. - Eulogy

Fenelon Writes on Lawrence's Dark Night

"Shall I say a word about Brother Lawrence... His sufferings were so intense for four years that no one could have convinced him of his salvation. "

February 12, 1691–Death

"He was ill three times during the last years of his life. When he recovered the first time he said to his physician, "Doctor, your remedies have worked too well for me. You have only delayed my happiness." He ended his last letter on February 6th with, "I hope for the merciful grace of seeing him in a few days." Lucid up to the last moments, Brother Lawrence died at the age of seventy-seven.





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SPIRITUAL MAXIMS

1. All things are possible to him who believes; still more to him who hopes; still more to him who loves; and most of all to him who practices all three. All of us who believe as we should and are baptized have taken the first step toward perfection. We will attain perfection if we practice the following principles of Christian conduct.
2. First of all, we must keep our eyes fixed on God in everything we say, do, or undertake. Our goal should be to become perfect in our adoration of Him throughout this earthly life in preparation for all eternity. We must make a firm resolution to overcome, with God's grace, all the difficulties encountered in a spiritual life.
3. From the outset of our Christian walk, we should remember who we are and that we are unworthy of the name of Christian, except for what Christ has done for us. In cleansing us from all our impurities, God desires to humble us and often allows us to go through a number of trials or difficulties to that end.
4. We must believe with certainty that it is both pleasing to God and good for us to sacrifice ourselves for Him. Without this complete submission of our hearts and minds to His will, He cannot work in us to make us perfect.
5. A soul depends on grace in proportion to its desire for greater perfection. We begin to need His help with every little thing and at every moment, because without it we can do nothing. The world, the flesh, and the devil wage a fierce and continuous war on our souls. If we weren't capable of humbly depending on God for assistance, our souls would be dragged down. Although this total dependence may sometimes go against our human nature, God takes great pleasure in it. Learning to do so will bring us rest.

ESSENTIAL PRACTICES FOR THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

6. The most holy and necessary practice in our spiritual life is the presence of God. That means finding constant pleasure in His divine company, speaking humbly and lovingly with Him in all seasons, at every moment, without limiting the conversation in any way. This is especially important in times of temptation, sorrow, separation from God, and even in times of unfaithfulness and sin.



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7. We must try to converse with God in little ways while we do our work; not in memorized prayer, not trying to recite previously formed thoughts. Rather, we should purely and simply reveal our hearts as the words come to us.
8. We must do everything with great care, avoiding impetuous actions, which are evidence of a disordered spirit. God wants us to work gently, calmly, and lovingly with Him, asking Him to accept our work. By this continual attention to God, we will resist the devil and cause him to flee. (See James 4:7.)
9. Whatever we do, even if we are reading the Word or praying, we should stop for a few minutes - as often as possible - to praise God from the depths of our hearts, to enjoy Him there in secret. Since we believe that God is always with us, no matter what we may be doing, why shouldn't we stop for a while to adore Him, to praise Him, to petition Him, to offer Him our hearts, and to thank Him?
What could please God more than for us to leave the cares of the world temporarily in order to worship Him in our spirits? These momentary retreats serve to free us from our selfishness, which can only exist in the world. In short, we cannot show our loyalty to God more than by renouncing our worldly selves as much as a thousand times a day to enjoy even a single moment with Him. This doesn't mean we must ignore the duties of the world forever; that would be impossible. Let prudence be our guide. However, I do believe that it is a common mistake of Spirit-filled people not to leave the cares of the world periodically to praise God in their spirits and to rest in the peace of His divine presence for a few moments.
10. Our adoration of God should be done in faith, believing that He really lives in our hearts and that He must be loved and served in spirit and in truth. We need to realize that He is the independent One, upon whom all of us depend, and that He is aware of everything that happens to us.
The Lord's perfections are truly beyond measure. By His infinite excellence and His sovereign place as both Creator and Saviour, He has the right to possess us and all that exists in both heaven and earth. It should be His good pleasure to do with each of us whatever He chooses through all time and eternity. Because of all He is to us, we owe Him our thoughts, words, and actions. Let us earnestly endeavour to do this.
11. We must carefully examine ourselves to see which virtues we are in most need of and which we find the hardest to acquire. We should also take note of the sins that we most frequently fall into and what occasions contribute to our fall. In our times of struggle with these areas, we can go before God with entire confidence and remain in the presence of His divine majesty. In humble adoration, we must confess



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our sins and weaknesses to Him, lovingly asking for the help of His grace in our time of need. Then, we will find that we can partake of all the virtues found in Him, even though we do not possess any of our own.

HOW TO ADORE GOD

12. To adore God in spirit and in truth means to adore Him as we should. Because God is a Spirit, He must be adored in spirit. That is to say, we must worship Him with a humble, sincere love that comes from the depth and centre of our souls. Only God can see this adoration, which we must repeat until it becomes part of our nature, as if God were one with our souls and our souls were one with God. Practice will demonstrate this.
13. Second, to adore God in truth is to recognize Him for what He is and ourselves for what we are. Adoring God in truth means that our hearts actually see God as infinitely perfect and worthy of our praise. What man, no matter how little sense he may have, would not exert all his strength to show his respect and love of this great God?
14. Third, to adore God in truth is to admit that our nature is just the opposite of His. Yet, He is willing to make us like Him, if we desire it. Who would be so rash as to neglect, even for a moment, the respect, the love, the service, and the continual adoration that we owe Him?

THE UNION OF THE SOUL WITH GOD

15. The first way in which the soul is united with God is through salvation, solely by His grace. This is followed by a period in which a saved soul comes to know God through a series of experiences, some of which bring the soul into closer union with Him and some take it further away. The soul learns which activities bring God's presence nearer and remains in His presence by practicing those activities. The most intimate union with God is the actual presence of God. Although this relationship with God is totally spiritual, it is quite dynamic, because the soul is not asleep; rather, it is powerfully excited. In this state, the soul is livelier than fire and brighter than the unclouded sun, yet, at the same time, it is tender and devout.



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This union is not a simple expression of the heart, like saying, “Lord, I love You with all my heart,” or other similar words. Rather, it is an inexpressible state of the soul - gentle, peaceful, respectful, humble, loving, and very simple - that urges the person to love God, to adore Him, and to embrace Him with both tenderness and joy.

Everyone who is striving for divine union must realize that, just because something is agreeable and delightful to the will, this does not mean that it will bring one closer to God. Sometimes it is helpful to disengage the sentiments of the will from the world, in order to focus entirely on God. If the will is able in some manner to comprehend Him, this can be only by love. And that love, which has its end in God, will be hindered by the things of this world.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

16. The presence of God is the concentration of the soul’s attention on God, remembering that He is always present. Know a person who for forty years has practiced the presence of God, to which he gives several other names. Sometimes he calls it a simple act - clear and distinct knowledge of God - and sometimes he calls it a vague view or a general, loving look at God - remembrance of Him. He also refers to it as attention to God, silent communion with God, confidence in God, or the life and the peace of the soul. To sum up, this person has told me that all these descriptions of the presence of God are merely synonyms that signify the same thing, a reality that has become natural to him.

My friend says that by dwelling in the presence of God he has established such a sweet communion with the Lord that His spirit abides, without much effort, in the restful peace of God. In this centre of rest, he is filled with a faith that equips him to handle anything that comes into his life.

This is what he calls the “actual presence” of God, which includes any and all kinds of communion a person who still dwells on the earth can possibly have with God in heaven. At times, he can live as if no one else existed on earth but himself and God. He lovingly speaks with God wherever he goes, asking Him for all he needs and rejoicing with Him in a thousand ways.

Nevertheless, one should realize that this conversation with God occurs in the depth and centre of the soul. It is there that the soul speaks to God heart to heart and always dwells in a great and profound peace that the soul enjoys in God. The trouble that happens in the world can become like a blaze of straw that goes out even as it is catching fire, while the soul retains its interior peace in God. The presence of God



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is, then, the life and nourishment of the soul, which can be acquired with the grace of God. Here are the means to do so.

THE MEANS OF ACQUIRING GOD'S PRESENCE

17. The first means is great purity of life.
18. The second is great fidelity to the practice of this presence and to the fostering of this awareness of God within, which must always be performed gently, humbly, and lovingly, without any disturbance or anxiety.
19. We must take special care that this inner awareness, no matter how brief it may be, precedes our activities, that it accompanies them from time to time, and that we complete all of them in the same way. Since much time and effort are required to acquire this practice, we must not get discouraged when we fail, for the habit is only formed with effort, yet once it is formed we will find contentment in everything. It is only right that the heart, the first to beat with life and the part that controls the rest of the body, should be the first and the last to love and adore God, whether by beginning or by completing our spiritual and physical activities, and generally, in all life's exercises. This is the reason we must take care to foster this awareness, which we must do naturally and normally, as I have said, thus making it easier.
20. It would be appropriate for beginners to formulate a few words interiorly, such as, "My God, I am completely yours," or "God of love, I love You with all my heart," or "Lord, fashion me according to Your heart," or any other words love spontaneously produces. But they must take care that their minds do not wander or return to creatures. The mind must be kept fixed on God alone, so that seeing itself so moved and led by the will, it will be obliged to remain with God.
21. This [practice of the] presence of God, somewhat difficult at the beginning, secretly accomplishes marvellous effects in the soul, draws abundant graces from the Lord, and, when practiced faithfully, imperceptibly leads it to this simple awareness, to this loving view of God present everywhere, which is the holiest, the surest, the easiest, and the most efficacious form of prayer.



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22. Please note that to arrive at this state, mortification of the senses is presupposed, since it is impossible for a soul that still finds some satisfaction in creatures to completely enjoy this divine presence; for to be with God, we must abandon creatures.

THE BLESSINGS OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

23. The first blessing that the soul receives from the practice of the presence of God is that its faith is livelier and more active everywhere in our lives. This is particularly true in difficult times, since it obtains the grace we need to deal with temptation and to conduct ourselves in the world. The soul - accustomed by this exercise to the practice of faith - can actually see and feel God by simply entering His presence. It invokes Him easily and obtains what it needs. In so doing, the soul could be said to approach the Blessed, in that it can almost say, "I no longer believe, but I see and experience." This faith becomes more and more penetrating as it develops through practice.

24. Second, the practice of the presence of God strengthens us in hope. Our hope increases as our faith penetrates God's secrets through practice of our holy exercise. The soul discovers in God a beauty infinitely surpassing not only that of bodies that we see on earth, but even that of the angels. Our hope increases and grows stronger, and the amount of good that it expects to enjoy - and that in some degree it tastes - reassures and sustains it.

25. The third blessing is that this practice causes the will to rejoice at being set apart from the world, setting it aglow with the fire of holy love. This is because the soul is always with God, who is a consuming fire, who reduces into powder whatever is opposed to Him. The soul, thus inflamed, can no longer live except in the presence of its God. This presence produces a holy ardor, a sacred urgency, and a violent desire in the heart to see this God whom the soul loves so dearly.

26. By practicing God's presence and continuously looking at Him, the soul familiarizes itself with Him to the extent that it passes almost its whole life in continual acts of love, praise, confidence, thanksgiving, offering, and petition. Sometimes all this may merge into one single act that does not end, because the soul is always in the ceaseless exercise of God's divine presence.



THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

LETTERS

FIRST LETTER

How the habitual sense of God's Presence was found.

1. Since you desire so earnestly that I should communicate to you the method by which I arrived at that habitual sense of GOD's Presence, which our LORD, of His mercy, has been pleased to vouchsafe to me; I must tell you, that it is with great difficulty that I am prevailed on by your importunities: and now I do it only upon the terms, that you show my letter to nobody. If I knew that you would let it be seen, all the desire that I have for your advancement would not be able to determine me to it. The account I can give you is:
2. Having found in many books different methods of going to GOD, and divers' 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.
3. 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: I worshipped Him the oftenest that I could, keeping my mind in His holy Presence, and recalling it as often as I found it wandered from Him. I found no small pain in this exercise, and yet I continued it, notwithstanding all the difficulties that occurred, without troubling or disquieting myself when my mind had wandered involuntarily. I made this my business, as much all the day long as at the appointed times of prayer; for at all times, every hour, every minute, even in the height of my business, I drove away from my mind everything that was capable of interrupting my thought of GOD.
4. Such has been my common practice ever since I entered into religion; and though I have done it very imperfectly, yet I have found great advantages by it. These, I well know, are to be imputed to the mere mercy and goodness of GOD, because we can do nothing without Him; and I still less than any. But when we are faithful to keep ourselves in His holy Presence, and set Him always before us, this not only hinders our offending Him, and doing anything that may displease Him, at least wilfully, but it also begets in us a holy freedom, and if I may so speak, a familiarity with GOD, wherewith we ask, and that successfully,



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the graces we stand in need of. In fine, by often repeating these acts, they become habitual, and the presence of GOD is rendered as it were natural to us. Give Him thanks, if you please, with me, for His great goodness towards me, which I can never sufficiently admire, for the many favours He has done to so miserable a sinner as I am. May all things praise Him. Amen.

SECOND LETTER

Difference between himself and others.

Faith alone consistently and persistently.

Deprecates this state being considered a delusion.

1. Not finding my manner of life in books, although I have no difficulty about it, yet, for greater security, I shall be glad to know your thoughts concerning it.
2. In a conversation some days since with a person of piety, he told me the spiritual life was a life of grace, which begins with servile fear, which is increased by hope of eternal life, and which is consummated by pure love; that each of these states had its different stages, by which one arrives at last at that blessed consummation.
3. I have not followed all these methods. On the contrary, from I know not what instincts, I found they discouraged me. This was the reason why, at my entrance into religion, I took a resolution to give myself up to GOD, as the best satisfaction I could make for my sins; and, for the love of Him, to renounce all besides.
4. For the first years, I commonly employed myself during the time set apart for devotion, with the thoughts of death, judgement, hell, heaven, and my sins. Thus, I continued some years applying my mind carefully the rest of the day, and even in the midst of my business, to the presence of GOD, whom I considered always as with me, often as in me.
5. At length I came insensibly to do the same thing during my set time of prayer, which caused in me great delight and consolation. This practice produced in me so high an esteem for GOD, that faith alone was capable to satisfy me in that point. [I suppose he means that all distinct notions he could form of GOD were unsatisfactory, because he perceived them to be unworthy of GOD, and therefore his mind was not to be satisfied but by the views of faith, which apprehends GOD as infinite and incomprehensible, as He is in Himself, and not as He can be conceived by human ideas.]



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6. Such was my beginning; and yet I must tell you, that for the first ten years I suffered much: the apprehension that I was not devoted to GOD, as I wished to be, my past sins always present to my mind, and the great unmerited favours which GOD did me, were the matter and source of my sufferings. During this time I fell often, and rose again presently. It seemed to me that the creatures, reason, and GOD Himself were against me; And faith alone for me. I was troubled sometimes with thoughts, that to believe I had received such favours was an effect of my presumption, which pretended to be at once where others arrive with difficulty; at other times that it was a wilful delusion, and that there was no salvation for me.
7. When I thought of nothing but to end my days in these troubles (which did not at all diminish the trust I had in GOD, and which served only to increase my faith), I found myself changed all at once; and my soul, which till that time was in trouble, felt a profound inward peace, as if she were in her centre and place of rest.
8. Ever since that time 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.
9. As for what passes in me at present, I cannot express it. I have no pain or difficulty about my state, because I have no will but that of GOD, which I endeavour to accomplish in all things, and to which I am so resigned, that I would not take up a straw from the ground against His order, or from any other motive but purely that of love to Him.
10. I have quitted all forms of devotion and set prayers but those to which my state obliges me. 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, which often causes in me joys and raptures inwardly, and sometimes also outwardly, so great that I am forced to use means to moderate them, and prevent their appearance to others.
11. In short, I am assured beyond all doubt, that my soul has been with GOD above these thirty years. I pass over many things, that I may not be tedious to you, yet I think it proper to inform you after what manner I consider myself before GOD, whom I behold as my King.
12. I consider myself as the most wretched of men, full of sores and corruption, and who has committed all sorts of crimes against his King; touched with a sensible regret I confess to



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Him all my wickedness, I ask His forgiveness, I abandon myself in His hands, that He may do what He pleases with me. 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, in a thousand and a thousand ways, and treats me in all respects as His favourite. It is thus I consider myself from time to time in His holy presence.

13. 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. If sometimes my thoughts wander from it by necessity or infirmity, I am presently recalled by inward motions, so charming and delicious that I am ashamed to mention them.
14. I desire your reverence to reflect rather upon my great wretchedness, of which you are fully informed, than upon the great favours which GOD does me, all unworthy and ungrateful as I am.
15. As for my set hours of prayer, they are only a continuation of the same exercise. Sometimes I consider myself there, as a stone before a carver, whereof he is to make a statue: presenting myself thus before GOD, I desire Him to make His perfect image in my soul and render me entirely like Himself.
16. At other times, when I apply myself to prayer, I feel all my spirit and all my soul lift itself up without any care or effort of mine; and it continues as it were suspended and firmly fixed in GOD, as in its centre and place of rest.
17. I know that some charge this state with inactivity, delusion, and self-love: I confess that it is a holy inactivity, and would be a happy self-love, if the soul in that state were capable of it; because in effect, while she is in this repose, she cannot be disturbed by such acts as she was formerly accustomed to, and which were then her support, but would now rather hinder than assist her.
18. Yet I cannot bear that this should be called delusion, because the soul which thus enjoys GOD desires herein nothing but Him. If this be delusion in me, it belongs to GOD to remedy it. Let Him do what He pleases with me: I desire only Him, and to be wholly devoted Him.



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19. You will, however, oblige me in sending me your opinion, to which I always pay a great deference, for I have a singular esteem for your reverence, and am yours in our Lord.

THIRD LETTER

For a soldier friend whom he encourages to trust in God.

1. We have a GOD who is infinitely gracious and knows all our wants. I always thought that He would reduce you to extremity. He will come in His own time, and when you least expect it. Hope in Him more than ever: thank Him with me for the favours He does you, particularly for the fortitude and patience which He gives you in your afflictions: it is a plain mark of the care He takes of you; comfort yourself then with Him, and give thanks for all.
2. I admire also the fortitude and bravery of M., GOD has given him a good disposition, and a good will; but there is in him still a little of the world, and a great deal of youth. I hope the affliction which GOD has sent him will prove a wholesome remedy to him, and make him enter into himself; it is an accident* very proper to engage him to put all his trust in Him, who accompanies him everywhere: let him think of Him the oftenest he can, especially in the greatest dangers. A little lifting up the heart suffices; a little remembrance of GOD, one act of inward worship, though upon a march, and sword in hand, are prayers which, however short, are nevertheless very acceptable to GOD; and far from lessening a soldier's courage in occasions of danger, they best serve to fortify it.
3. Let him then think of GOD the most he can; let him accustom himself, by degrees, to this small but holy exercise; nobody perceives it, and nothing is easier than to repeat often in the day these little internal adorations. Recommend to him, if you please, that he think of GOD the most he can, in the manner here directed; it is very fit and most necessary for a soldier, who is daily exposed to dangers of life, and often of his salvation. I hope that GOD will assist him and all the family, to whom I present my service, being theirs and yours.

* In this context the word *accident* is defined as fortuitous or fortunate
For further definitions of *accident*, please refer to dictionary.com



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FOURTH LETTER

Writes of himself as of a third person and encourages his correspondent to press on to fuller practising of the Presence of God.

1. I have taken this opportunity to communicate to you the sentiments of one of our society concerning the admirable effects and continual assistances which he receives from the presence of GOD. Let you and me both profit by them.
2. You must know, his continual care has been, for above forty years past that he has spent in religion, to be always with GOD; and to do nothing, say nothing, and think nothing which may displease Him; and this without any other view than purely for the love of Him, and because He deserves infinitely more.
3. He is now so accustomed to that Divine presence, that he receives from it continual succours upon all occasions. For about thirty years, his soul has been filled with joys so continual, and sometimes so great, that he is forced to use means to moderate them, and to hinder their appearing outwardly.
4. If sometimes he is a little too much absent from that Divine presence, GOD presently makes Himself to be felt in his soul to recall him; which often happens when he is most engaged in his outward business: he answers with exact fidelity to these inward drawings, either by an elevation of his heart towards GOD, or by a meek and fond regard to Him, or by such words as love forms upon these occasions; as for instance, My GOD, here I am all devoted to Thee: LORD, make me according to Thy heart. And then it seems to him (as in effect he feels it) that this GOD of love, satisfied with such few words, reposes again, and rests in the depth and centre of his soul. The experience of these things gives him such an assurance that GOD is always in the depth or bottom of his soul, and renders him incapable of doubting it, upon any account whatever.
5. Judge by this what content and satisfaction he enjoys, while he continually finds in himself so great a treasure: he is no longer in an anxious search after it, but has it open before him, and may take what he pleases of it.
6. He complains much of our blindness; and cries often that we are to be pitied who content ourselves with so little. GOD, saith 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 favours plentifully; there they flow like a torrent, which,



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after being forcibly stopped against its ordinary course, when it has found a passage, spreads itself with impetuosity and abundance.

7. 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; death follows us close, let us be well prepared for it; for we die but once, and a miscarriage there is irretrievable.
8. I say again, let us enter into ourselves. The time presses: there is no room for delay; our souls are at stake. I believe you have taken such effectual measures, that you will not be surprised. I commend you for it, it is the one thing necessary: we must, nevertheless, always work at it, because 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. If the vessel of our soul is still tossed with winds and storms, let us awake the LORD, who reposes in it, and He will quickly calm the sea.
9. I have taken the liberty to impart to you these good sentiments, that you may compare them with your own: they will serve again to kindle and inflame them, if by misfortune (which GOD forbid, for it would be indeed a great misfortune) they should be, though never so little, cooled. Let us then both recall our first fervours. Let us profit by the example and the sentiments of this brother, who is little known of the world, but known of GOD, and extremely caressed by Him. I will pray for you; do you pray instantly for me, who am yours in our LORD.

FIFTH LETTER

Prayer for a sister who is about to make a vow and profession.

A fresh insisting upon the necessity and virtue of practising the Presence of God.

1. I received this day two books and a letter from Sister, who is preparing to make her profession, and upon that account desires the prayers of your holy society, and yours in particular. I perceive that she reckons much upon them; pray do not disappoint her. Beg of GOD that she may make her sacrifice in the view of His love alone, and with a firm resolution to be wholly devoted to Him.



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2. I will send you one of those books which treat of the presence of GOD; a subject which, in my opinion, contains the whole spiritual life; and it seems to me that whoever duly practises it will soon become spiritual.
3. 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.
4. There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful, than that of a continual conversation with GOD: those only can comprehend it who practise and experience it; yet I do not advise you to do it from that motive; 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.
5. Were I a preacher, I should above all other things preach the practice of the presence of GOD; and were I a director, I should advise all the world to do it: so necessary do I think it, and so easy too.
6. 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 wilfully 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.
7. Set heartily about this work, and if you do it as you ought, be assured that you will soon find the effects of it. I will assist you with my prayers, poor as they are: I recommend myself earnestly to yours, and those of your holy society.

SIXTH LETTER

To a member of the order who had received from him a book, and to whom he again enlarges on his favourite topic.

Encouragement to persevere.

1. I have received from Mrs. - the things which you gave her for me. I wonder that you have not given me your thoughts of the little book I sent to you, and which you must have received. Pray set heartily about the practice of it in your old age; it is better late than never.



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2. I cannot imagine how religious persons can live satisfied without the practice of the presence of GOD. For my part I keep myself retired with Him in the depth of centre 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.
3. This exercise does not much fatigue the body: it is, however, proper to deprive it sometimes, nay often, of many little pleasures which are innocent and lawful: for GOD will not permit that a soul which desires to be devoted entirely to Him should take other pleasures than with Him; that is more than reasonable.
4. I do not say that therefore we must put any violent constraint upon ourselves. No, we must serve GOD in a holy freedom, we must do our business faithfully, without trouble or disquiet; recalling our mind to GOD mildly and with tranquillity, as often as we find it wandering from Him.
5. 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: one while by an act of praise, of adoration, or of desire; one while by an act of resignation, or thanksgiving; and in all the manner which our spirit can invent.
6. Be not discouraged by the repugnance which you may find in it from nature; you must do yourself violence. At the first, one often thinks it lost time; but you must go on, and resolve to persevere in it to death, notwithstanding all the difficulties that may occur. I recommend myself to the prayers of your holy society, and yours in particular. I am yours in our LORD.

SEVENTH LETTER

At the age of nearly fourscore exhorts his correspondent, who is sixty-four, to live and die with God and promises and asks for prayer.

1. I pity you much. It will be of great importance if you can leave the care of your affairs to and spend the remainder of your life only in worshipping GOD. He requires no great matters of us; a little remembrance of Him from time to time, a little adoration: sometimes



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to pray for His grace, sometimes to offer Him your sufferings, and sometimes to return Him thanks for the favours He has given you, and still gives you, in the midst of your troubles, and to console yourself with Him the oftenest you can. Lift up your heart to Him, sometimes even at your meals, and when you are in company: the least little remembrance will always be acceptable to Him. You need not cry very loud; He is nearer to us than we are aware of.

2. 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. Everyone 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. We have but little time to live; you are near sixty-four, and I am almost eighty. Let us live and die with GOD: sufferings will be sweet and pleasant to us, while we are with Him: and the greatest pleasures will be, without Him, a cruel punishment to us. May He be blessed for all. Amen.
3. Use yourself then by degrees thus to worship Him, to beg His grace, to offer Him your heart from time to time, in the midst of your business, even every moment if you can. Do not always scrupulously confine yourself to certain rules, or particular forms of devotion, but act with a general confidence in GOD, with love and humility. You may assure - of my poor prayers, and that I am their servant, and yours particularly.

EIGHTH LETTER

Concerning wandering thoughts in prayer.

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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,



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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.

4. 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.
5. I have told you already at large, in my former letters, of the advantages we may draw from this practice of the presence of GOD: let us set about it seriously and pray for one another.

NINTH LETTER

Enclosing a letter to a corresponding sister, whom he regards with respect tinged with fear.

His old theme concisely put.

1. The enclosed is an answer to that which I received from; pray deliver it to her. She seems to me full of good will, but she would go faster than grace. One does not become holy all at once. I recommend her to you: we ought to help one another by our advice, and yet more by our good examples. You will oblige me to let me hear of her from time to time, and whether she be very fervent and very obedient.
2. Let us thus think often that our only business in this life is to please GOD, that perhaps all besides is but folly and vanity. You and I have lived above forty years in religion [i.e., a monastic life]. Have we employed them in loving and serving GOD, who by His mercy has called us to this state and for that very end? I am filled with shame and confusion, when I reflect on the one hand upon the great favours which GOD has done, and incessantly continues to do, me; and on the other, upon the ill-use I have made of them, and my small advancement in the way of perfection.
3. Since by His mercy He gives us still a little time, let us begin in earnest, let us repair the lost time, let us return with a full assurance to that FATHER of mercies, who is always ready to receive us affectionately. Let us renounce, let us generously renounce, for the



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love of Him, all that is not Himself; He deserves infinitely more. Let us think of Him perpetually. Let us put all our trust in Him: I doubt not but we shall soon find the effects of it, in receiving the abundance of His grace, with which we can do all things, and without which we can do nothing but sin.

4. We cannot escape the dangers which abound in life, without the actual and continual help of GOD; let us then pray to Him for it continually. How can we pray to Him without being with Him? How can we be with Him but in thinking of Him often? And how can we often think of Him, but by a holy habit which we should form of it? You will tell me that I am always saying the same thing: it is true, for this is the best and easiest method I know; and as I use no other, I advise all the world to it. We must know before we can love. In order to know GOD, we must often think of Him; and when we come to love Him, we shall then also think of Him often, for our heart will be with our treasure. This is an argument which well deserves your consideration.

TENTH LETTER

**Has difficulty, but sacrifices his will, to write as requested.
The loss of a friend may lead to acquaintance with the Friend.**

1. I have had a good deal of difficulty to bring myself to write to M. -, and I do it now purely because you and Madam desire me. Pray write the directions and send it to him. I am very well pleased with the trust which you have in GOD: I wish that He may increase it in you more and more: we cannot have too much in so good and faithful a Friend, who will never fail us in this world nor in the next.
2. If M. - makes his advantage of the loss he has had, and puts all his confidence in GOD, He will soon give him another friend, more powerful and more inclined to serve him. He disposes of hearts as He pleases. Perhaps M. - was too much attached to him he has lost. We ought to love our friends, but without encroaching upon the love of GOD, which must be the principal.
3. Pray remember what I have recommended to you, which is, to think often on GOD, by day, by night, in your business, and even in your diversions. He is always near you and with you; leave Him not alone. You would think it rude to leave a friend alone, who came to visit you: why then must GOD be neglected? Do not then forget Him, but think on Him often, adore Him continually live and die with Him; this is the glorious employment of a



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Christian; in a word, this is our profession, if we do not know it we must learn it. I will endeavour to help you with my prayers and am yours in our LORD.

ELEVENTH LETTER

To one who is in great pain. God is the Physician of body and of soul.

Feels that he would gladly suffer at His wish.

1. 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. The men of the world do not comprehend these truths, nor is it to be wondered at, since they suffer like what they are, and not like Christians: they consider sickness as a pain to nature, and not as a favour from GOD; and seeing it only in that light, they find nothing in it but grief and distress. But 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.
2. I wish you could convince yourself that GOD is often (in some sense) nearer to us and more effectually present with us, in sickness than in health. Rely upon no other Physician, for, according to my apprehension, He reserves your cure to Himself. Put then all your trust in Him, and you will soon find the effects of it in your recovery, which we often retard, by putting greater confidence in physic than in GOD.
3. Whatever remedies you make use of, they will succeed only so far as He permits. 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.
4. I foresee that you will tell me that I am very much at my ease, that I eat and drink at the table of the LORD. YOU have reason: but think you that it would be a small pain to the greatest criminal in the world, to eat at the king's table, and be served by him, and notwithstanding such favours to be without assurance of pardon? I believe he would feel exceeding great uneasiness, and such as nothing could moderate, but only his trust in the goodness of his sovereign. So I assure you, that whatever pleasures I taste at the table of



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my King, yet my sins, ever present before my eyes, as well as the uncertainty of my pardon, torment me, though in truth that torment itself is pleasing.

5. Be satisfied with the condition in which GOD places you: however happy you may think me, I envy you. Pains and suffering would be a paradise to me, while I should suffer with my GOD; and the greatest pleasure would be hell to me, if I could relish them without Him; all my consolation would be to suffer something for His sake.
6. I must, in a little time, go to GOD. What comforts me in this life is, that I now see Him by faith; and I see Him in such a manner as might make me say sometimes, I believe no more, but I see. I feel what faith teaches us, and, in that assurance and that practice of faith, I will live and die with Him.
7. Continue then always with GOD: 'tis the only support and comfort for your affliction. I shall beseech Him to be with you. I present my service.

TWELFTH LETTER

To the same correspondent probably and expresses his own abiding comfort through faith.

1. 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.
2. 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 shall endeavour to assist you with my poor prayers.
3. GOD has many ways of drawing us to Himself. He sometimes hides Himself from us: but faith alone, which will not fail us in time of need, ought to be our support, and the foundation of our confidence, which must be all in GOD.



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4. I know not how GOD will dispose of me: I am always happy: all the world suffer; and I, who deserve the severest discipline, feel joys so continual, and so great, that I can scarce contain them.
5. I would willingly ask of GOD a part of your sufferings, but that I know my weakness, which is so great, that if He left me one moment to myself, I should be the most wretched man alive. And yet I know not how He can leave me alone, because faith gives me as strong a conviction as sense can do, that He never forsakes us, till we have first forsaken Him. Let us fear to leave Him. Let us be always with Him. Let us live and die in His presence. Do you pray for me, as I for you.

THIRTEENTH LETTER

To the same he exhorts for fuller and entire confidence in God, for body and soul.

1. 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. As your case is, 'tis my opinion that you should leave off human remedies and resign yourself entirely to the providence of GOD; perhaps He stays only for that resignation and a perfect trust in Him to cure you. Since notwithstanding all your cares, physic has hitherto proved unsuccessful, and your malady still increases, it will not be tempting GOD to abandon yourself in His hands and expect all from Him.
2. I told you, in my last, that He sometimes permits bodily diseases to cure the distempers of the soul. Have courage then: make a virtue of necessity: ask of GOD, not deliverance from your pains, but strength to bear resolutely, for the love of Him, all that He should please, and as long as He shall please.
3. Such prayers, indeed, are a little hard to nature, but most acceptable to GOD, and sweet to those that love Him. 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. I will help you with my prayers, poor as they are, and shall be, always, yours in our LORD.



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FOURTEENTH LETTER

Gratitude, for mercies to his correspondent, and measure of relief while he has himself been near death, but with consolation in his suffering.

1. I render thanks to our LORD, for having relieved you a little, according to your desire. 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; so that if in this life we would enjoy the peace of paradise, we must accustom ourselves to a familiar, humble, affectionate conversation with Him: we must hinder our spirits wandering from Him upon any occasion: we must make our heart a spiritual temple, wherein to adore Him incessantly: we must watch continually over ourselves, that we may not do, nor say, nor think anything that may displease Him. When our minds are thus employed about GOD, suffering will become full of unction and consolation.
2. I know that to arrive at this state, the beginning is very difficult; for we must act purely in faith. But though it is difficult, we know also that we can do all things with the grace of GOD, which He never refuses to them who ask it earnestly. Knock, persevere in knocking, and I answer for it that He will open to you in His due time, and grant you all at once what He has deferred during many years. Adieu. Pray to Him for me, as I pray to Him for you. I hope to see Him quickly.

FIFTEENTH LETTER

From his death-bed.

Repeats the same exhortation to knowledge, that we may love.

1. 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.
2. 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



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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.

3. Let us not settle for seeking or loving GOD only for the graces He has given or can give us, no matter how great they may be. These favours, though never so great, cannot bring us so near to GOD as faith does in one simple act. Let us seek Him often by faith: He is within us; seek Him not elsewhere. Are we not rude and deserve blame, if we leave Him alone, to busy ourselves about trifles, which do not please Him and perhaps offend Him? 'Tis to be feared these trifles will one day cost us dear.
4. 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 favour 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 cannot thank Him sufficiently for the relaxation He has vouchsafed you. I hope from His mercy the favour to see Him within a few days. Let us pray for one another.

[He took to his bed two days after and died within the week.]



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THE RULE OF ALBERT



1. Albert, called by the grace of God to be Patriarch of the Church of Jerusalem, greets his beloved sons in Christ, B. and the other hermits living in obedience to him near the spring on Mount Carmel: salvation in the Lord and the blessing of the Holy Spirit.
2. Many times and in different ways the holy Fathers have laid down that everyone - whatever be their state in life or the religious life chosen by them - should live in allegiance to Jesus Christ and serve him zealously with a pure heart and a good conscience.
3. Now then you have come to me seeking a formula of life according to your purpose, which you are to observe in the future.
4. The first thing I lay down is that you shall have a prior, one of yourselves, chosen by the unanimous consent of all, or of the greater and more mature part. All the others shall promise him obedience fulfilling it by deeds, as well as chastity and the renunciation of property.
5. You can take up places in solitary areas or in sites given to you, one suitable and convenient for your observance in the judgement of the prior and the brothers.



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6. Moreover, taking account of the site you propose to occupy, all of you are to have separate cells; these are to be assigned by the prior himself with the agreement of the other brothers or the more mature of them.
7. You are, however, to eat in a common refectory what may have been given to you, listening together to a reading from holy Scripture, if this can conveniently be done.
8. No brother is permitted to change the place assigned to him or exchange with another, unless with the permission of the prior at the time.
9. The prior's cell shall be near the entrance to the place so that he may first meet those who come to the place and everything afterwards may be done as he wills and decides.
10. All are to remain in their cells or near them, meditating day and night on the law of the Lord and being vigilant in prayers, unless otherwise lawfully occupied.
11. Those who have learned to say the canonical hours with the clerics should do so according to the practice of the holy Fathers and the approved custom of the Church. Those who do not know the hours are to say the Our Father twenty-five times for the night office - except for Sunday and solemn feasts when this number is doubled, so that the Our Father is said fifty times. It is to be said seven times for the morning Lauds and for the other Hours, except for Vespers when it must be said fifteen times.
12. None of the brothers is to claim something as his own; everything is to be in common and is to be distributed to each one by the Prior - that is, the brother deputed by him to this office - having regard to the age and needs of each one.
13. You may have asses or mules according to your needs and some provision of animals or poultry.
14. An oratory is to be built as conveniently as possible in the midst of the cells; you are to gather daily in the morning for Mass, where this is convenient.
15. On Sundays, or other days if necessary, you shall discuss the welfare of the group and the salvation of souls; at this time excesses and faults of the brothers, if such come to light, are to be corrected in the middle way of charity.



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16. You are to fast every day except Sundays from the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross until Easter Sunday, unless illness or bodily weakness, or other just cause counsels a lifting of the fast, since necessity has no law.
17. You are to abstain from meat, unless it is to be taken as a remedy for illness or bodily weakness. Since you must more frequently beg on journeys, in order not to burden your hosts you may eat food cooked with meat outside your own houses. At sea, however, meat may be eaten.
18. Since human life on earth is a trial and all who want to live devotedly in Christ suffer persecution; your enemy the devil prowls about like a roaring lion seeking whom he might devour. You must then with all diligence put on the armour of God so that you may be able to stand up to the ambushes of the enemy.
19. Your loins are to be girded with the belt of chastity; your breast is to be protected by holy thoughts, for the Scripture says, holy thoughts will save you. Put on the breastplate of justice, so that you may love the Lord your God from your whole heart, your whole soul and your whole strength, and your neighbour as yourselves. In all things take up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the darts of the evil one; without faith, indeed, it is impossible to please God. The helmet of salvation is to be placed on your head, so that you may hope for salvation from the one Saviour, who saves his people from their sins. The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, is to dwell abundantly in your mouths and hearts. So whatever you have to do, is to be done in the word of the Lord.
20. You should do some work, so that the devil will always find you occupied, and he may not through your idleness find some entrance to your souls. In this matter you have both the teaching and the example of Blessed Paul the Apostle; Christ spoke through his mouth; he has been set up and given by God as a preacher and teacher of the nations in faith and truth; in following him you cannot go wrong. In work and weariness, he said, we have been with you, working day and night so as not to be a burden to you; it was not as though we had no right, but we wished to give ourselves as a model for imitation. For when we were with you, we gave this precept: whoever is unwilling to work shall not eat. We have heard that there are restless people going around who do nothing. We condemn such people and implore them in the Lord Jesus Christ that working in silence they should earn their bread. This is a good and holy way: follow it.



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21. The apostle therefore recommends silence, when he tells us to work in it; the prophet too testifies that silence is the promotion of justice; and again, in silence and in hope will be your strength. Therefore, we lay down that from the recitation of Compline you are to maintain silence until after Prime the following day. At other times, though silence is not to be so strictly observed, you are to be diligent in avoiding much talking, since scripture states and experience likewise teaches, sin is not absent where there is much talking; also he who is careless in speech will experience evil, and the one who uses many words harms his soul. Again, the Lord says in the gospel: an account will have to be given on the day of judgement for every vain word. Each of you is to weigh his words and have a proper restraint for his mouth, so that he may not stumble and fall through speech and his fall be irreparable and fatal. He is with the prophet to guard his ways so that he does not offend through the tongue. Silence, which is the promotion of justice, is to be diligently and carefully observed.
22. You, Brother B., and whoever is appointed Prior after you, shall always keep in mind and practice what the Lord said in the Gospel: Whoever wishes to be greater among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first must be your slave.
23. And you too, the other brothers are humbly to honour your prior, and rather than thinking about him, you are to look to Christ who set him as head over you; he said to the leaders of the Church, whoever hears you hears me, and whoever despises you despises me. Thus, you will not be judged guilty of contempt, but through obedience you will merit the reward of eternal life.
24. I have written these things briefly to you establishing a way of life for you, according to which you are to conduct yourselves. If anyone does more the Lord himself when he comes again will repay him. You are, however, to use discretion, which is the moderator of virtue.

