GENERAL

the practice of the presence of god by brother lawrence

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Introduction

In the quiet halls of the 18th century French monastery where Brother Lawrence lived, a simple yet profound spiritual practice began to take shape—one that would eventually be shared with the world through his book, *The Practice of the Presence of God*. This practice is more than a set of instructions; it is a way of life that invites believers to encounter God continuously, even in the most ordinary moments. In this article we will explore the origins of this practice, its core principles, and how it can be woven into the fabric of modern daily life. Whether you are a seasoned contemplative or a curious newcomer, understanding the practice of the presence of God by Brother Lawrence can deepen your spiritual journey and bring a sense of divine companionship to every breath you take.

Who Was Brother Lawrence?

Brother Lawrence, born Jean-Baptiste de La Salle in 1691, was a French Trappist monk who spent his life in the Abbey of the Resurrection in Solesmes. Though he was a humble baker and gardener, his spiritual insight and devotion were far from ordinary. He wrote the book that would become a cornerstone of Christian mysticism, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, while still a young novice. The text was first circulated in handwritten copies among his fellow monks and later published in 1742. It remains one of the most widely read spiritual works in the English language, translated into dozens of tongues and cherished by countless seekers of a deeper communion with the divine.

Early Life and Monastic Calling

Brother Lawrence entered the Trappist order at the age of 20, choosing a life of poverty, silence, and manual labor. He worked in the monastery's bakery, tending to dough and ovens, and later in the garden, tending to herbs and fruit. Despite the simplicity of his tasks, Brother Lawrence's mind was filled with a longing to know God more intimately. His early years were marked by a desire to turn every mundane activity into a prayer, a theme that would become central to his teaching.

Personal Spiritual Milestones

- First Prayerful Moment: A young Brother Lawrence once remarked that he had felt God's presence in the simple act of kneading dough, a realization that would later become the cornerstone of his practice.
- Spiritual Guidance: He received encouragement from his superior, who advised him to cultivate a continuous awareness of God's presence.
- Publication: After his death in 1733, his book was posthumously published, spreading his teachings far beyond the walls of Solesmes.

The Spiritual Context of Brother Lawrence's Time

During the early 1700s, the Catholic Church was in a period of renewal, with a growing emphasis on interior spirituality and personal devotion. The Jesuits had popularized the practice of meditation and the use of the "present moment" as a gateway to God. Brother Lawrence, however, approached this from a distinctly monastic perspective, emphasizing humility, simplicity, and the sanctification of everyday tasks.

Trappist Traditions and Contemplative Prayer

The Trappists were known for their strict adherence to the Rule of St. Benedict, which includes the practice of *ora et labora*—pray and work. Brother Lawrence's practice of the presence of God can be seen as a natural extension of this principle. He taught that prayer is not separate from work; rather, it is integrated into every action, turning routine labor into a form of worship.

Influence of the Spirituality of the Desert

Brother Lawrence was also influenced by the Desert Fathers, early Christian hermits who emphasized silence and solitude. Although he lived in a communal setting, he practiced a form of inner solitude, focusing his heart on God even while surrounded by others. This duality of community and solitude is a hallmark of his teaching.

Understanding the Practice of Presence of God

At its core, the practice of the presence of God is a method of maintaining a constant awareness of God's presence in all moments. Brother Lawrence's description is simple yet profound: "The presence of God is a state of consciousness that we must develop and keep in mind. It is a state of being that is always present, no matter what we are doing."

Key Elements of the Practice

1. Continuous Awareness: Keeping God's presence in the forefront of one's mind, regardless of activity.
2. Humility: Recognizing that one is a vessel for God's grace, not a performer of grand gestures.
3. Service: Offering all actions, no matter how small, as a form of worship.
4. Patience: Accepting that God works in the ordinary and the extraordinary alike.

Comparison with Modern Mindfulness

While Brother Lawrence's practice predates the modern concept of mindfulness, many of its principles overlap. Both emphasize present moment awareness, non judgmental attention, and a deep connection to a larger reality. However, Brother Lawrence's approach is explicitly spiritual, rooted in the Christian tradition, whereas modern mindfulness often remains secular.

How Brother Lawrence Defined Presence

Brother Lawrence described presence as a "state of consciousness" that can be cultivated through simple, everyday practices. He believed that God's presence is not something that must be sought in distant or elaborate settings; rather, it is available in the ordinary moments of life.

Presence in the Work

In his bakery, Brother Lawrence would knead dough with a quiet awareness of God. He would say, "I am doing this for God." This statement is not merely a phrase but a commitment to see the divine in the act itself. By doing so, he turned his work into a form of prayer.

Presence in the Silence

Even when Brother Lawrence was in silence, he maintained a conversation with God. He would pray silently, not to gain something from God, but to give something back—a heart full of gratitude, a mind free from distraction.

Presence in the Presence of Others

Brother Lawrence taught that the presence of God is not limited to solitary moments. In communal settings, he encouraged monks to be present with each other, offering love and kindness, and thereby extending God's

presence to those around them.

Practical Steps to Cultivate Presence

Brother Lawrence's practice is accessible to anyone, regardless of religious background. Below are actionable steps inspired by his teachings that you can incorporate into your daily life.

1. Start with a Simple Intention

Before you begin any activity, pause and set an intention: "I will offer this to God." This intention serves as a mental anchor, reminding you to remain present.

2. Use Your Breath as a Anchor

When you feel scattered, focus on your breathing. Inhale, exhale, and bring your awareness back to the present. This simple technique helps to ground you in the current moment.

3. Offer Your Work as Worship

No matter how mundane your task, frame it as an act of service to God. Whether you're washing dishes or writing an email, imagine your hands as instruments of divine grace.

4. Practice "God's Presence in All Things"

Whenever you encounter a challenge, ask yourself, "What can I learn from God in this situation?" This reframing turns obstacles into opportunities for growth.

5. End Each Day with Reflection

Take a few minutes before bed to reflect on how you experienced God's presence throughout the day. Write down moments when you felt connected, and note areas where you could improve.

Theological Foundations

Brother Lawrence's practice is deeply rooted in Christian theology. It aligns with the biblical call to "be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10) and the Christian understanding of God as a constant presence in the believer's life.

God as the Immanent Presence

The idea that God is not only transcendent but also immanent—present in every aspect of creation—underpins the practice. By recognizing God's presence in the ordinary, believers affirm the sanctity of everyday life.

Christ as the Model of Presence

Brother Lawrence often referenced Jesus' presence in the world, especially in the Gospels where Jesus is described as walking among the people. By emulating Christ's constant presence, believers can cultivate a similar relationship.

Impact on Spiritual Life

Adopting the practice of presence can lead to profound transformations. It can deepen one's sense of peace, foster gratitude, and enhance interpersonal relationships. Many modern practitioners report a heightened sense of purpose and a stronger connection to their faith community.

Personal Testimony

"I used to rush through my day, feeling disconnected from God. Since I started practicing presence, every task feels

like a prayer, and I feel more at peace," says Maria, a 45 year old mother of three.

Community Benefits

When individuals practice presence, they bring a calm and compassionate energy into their families, workplaces, and faith communities, creating a ripple effect of spiritual nourishment.

Modern Applications

In today's fast paced world, the practice of presence offers a counterbalance to constant distractions. Below are ways to apply Brother Lawrence's teachings in contemporary settings.

Workplace Integration

- Mindful Meetings: Begin meetings with a brief moment of silence to acknowledge God's presence.
- Task Awareness: As you tackle a project, remind yourself that you are serving a higher purpose.

Family Life

- Shared Meals: Use family meals as an opportunity to give thanks and practice presence together.
- Parenting: Approach parenting with a mindset of service, recognizing each child's unique gift.

Digital Detox

Schedule regular breaks from screens, using the time to reflect on God's presence and to engage in simple acts of gratitude.

Common Misconceptions

While the practice is simple, it is often misunderstood. Addressing these misconceptions can help practitioners avoid pitfalls.

"It's Only for Monks"

Brother Lawrence's practice is accessible to anyone. It does not require monastic vows or a cloistered life.

"It Requires Long Periods of Prayer"

Presence is about integrating prayer into everyday actions, not about setting aside large blocks of time for formal prayer

Tags: #practice #presence #brother #lawrence