

Homily for the 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

As I mentioned in the bulletin previously, last week I was away on my annual priest retreat. I went up to Mt. Saviour – a Benedictine monastery near Elmira, New York. It's in a really rural setting, like here. But the only discernible difference I could tell was that instead of hearing the bellowing of the bulls next door, I now heard the somewhat charming bleating of the sheep there – and there were lots of them.

Anyway, usually on my retreat, I bring a long a book that I feel God calling me to read and spend some time with. And because I was feeling pretty tired this year, I brought along a short paperback I got three years ago at another retreat. The book is called *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence, a Carmelite monk who lived in the 1600s in France. Well, it was only 100 or so pages long, so I ended up finishing it rather quickly. So I moved on to another book. But, lo and behold, this book by a Christian author, who wasn't even Catholic, mentioned this same Brother Lawrence, seemingly out of nowhere. Now, what are the chances of some modern-day evangelical pastor quoting some obscure 15th century monk? But on top of that, Friday evening when I got back home, I went over to my office to check through my mountain of mail. And when I turned the page on my one-a-day calendar on prayer, who was listed? Brother Lawrence. I never heard of him before, and I imagine next to no one here today has either! Anyway, obviously God got my attention. We call these experiences of God-incidence, “confirming signs” – they're signs that confirm that God is speaking to us in some particular way.

What God was speaking to me through Brother Lawrence's words on faith and prayer is simply – well, simple. As the title of his book, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, reveals, the essence of the spiritual life is for us to constantly and consciously put ourselves in God's presence – in everything. Literally, as we go throughout the day, wherever we are and whatever we find ourselves doing, seeking to really put ourselves in God's company. We could call this “minute-by-minute” prayer – talking to God in our minds as our day unfolds.

Now you might say, “Well that's easy for you Br. Carmelite monk – your whole life is devoted to God and prayer!” However, the beauty of Brother Lawrence's simple example doesn't discriminate whether we're in the monastery, or on the subway, or on the farm! Whether we're in prayer or at Mass, whether we're at work or on vacation – in everything we do, we bring to mind that God is there with us – even right now here at Mass, Jesus is sitting next to you! In fact, for Brother Lawrence, one of his main responsibilities was in the kitchen – something which he, like many of us, despised! But as he said, “In the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament.”

Can you imagine being so in love with God that you constantly seek, with effort, to remind yourself that you are always in His presence? And why wouldn't we want to seek to do this? If God is truly the source of all love and forgiveness and patience and mercy, then wouldn't constantly seeking God, be the way in all of our daily interactions to be loving and forgiving and patient and merciful? This is what eternity is going to be after all – us praising and adoring and worshipping this God who loves us so much for all His grace and goodness and might!

Now lest you think I'm way off my rocker for proposing that merely picturing God with us as we go jogging and talking to Him is a program for sanctity, just look at our second reading today from St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians. St. Paul says things like: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who *chose us* in Christ... In him *we have redemption* by his blood...in accord with the riches of his grace that *he lavished upon us*.... In Christ we were also *chosen*, so that we might exist for the *praise* of God's glory..." Translation? Everything we have is from God: life, salvation, grace! Everything is God's gift to us. He bestows every good gift upon us, and all we have to do is gratefully receive – is just to *be* in God's Presence. Doesn't it make sense that all we have to do is just "give ourselves up to God" wherever we are and in whatever we do?

To close, I'd like to offer one of Brother Lawrence's prayers, that caught my attention, especially as I ate in silence with the monks at Mt. Saviour in their dining room on my retreat: "Lord of all pots and pans and things, make me a saint by getting meals and washing up the plates!" God bless you.