

Jesus never stopped being “Emmanuel”. God continues to always be with us. What if we really lived like it? You can – here’s how:

I would like to tell you about a man who lived in Paris, France in the 17th century. His name was Nicolas Herman. Nicolas grew up in poverty. When he became old enough to do so, he joined the French army, simply because it would provide him with food and clothing. He fought and was injured in the Thirty Years’ War, and became a personal servant on a family estate.

After working in this role for a few years, Nicolas felt compelled by God to join the local monastery. He was not an educated man, and therefore he was not able to do the study necessary to become a minister. Thus, for the rest of his life, he maintained a lower position in the monastery as a lay brother, and he took on the religious name, “Lawrence of the Resurrection”. So, he became known as simply, “Brother Lawrence”.

As Brother Lawrence was not a minister, he was not eligible to lead or teach in the monastery, and so he was given the job working in the monastery kitchen, cooking the meals and washing the dishes. He maintained this same role as a cook and a dish-cleaner for many years before he finally received a promotion near the end of his life: he was promoted to the job of sandal-repairman. He would mend and repair the other monks’ and ministers’ sandals and shoes in the monastery.

Despite his lowly position and lack of education, Brother Lawrence became one of the most sought-after brothers in the monastery.

- *He was known for his personal character and integrity.*
- *His work ethic was impeccable, and the quality of his work earned the respect of everyone around him.*
- *He was also humble, peaceful, and had a reputation as one filled with the Spirit of God.*

Brother Lawrence did not develop this reputation as a deeply spiritual man by accident. He had a method that he dedicated himself to during all those years of doing tedious, manual labor – while cooking and cleaning and scrubbing dishes – and later, while mending shoes.

While he worked, Brother Lawrence constantly thought about the love of God and the character of God. He worked in constant prayer – both prayers of talking to God and prayers of silently listening for God in his work. After his death, Brother Lawrence’s method became known as “Practicing the Presence of God”, and a book of the same name was compiled about his method.

This book is one of the most important contributions we have on spiritual development from the 17th century – and it came from a simple, uneducated, hard-working dishwasher and sandal repairman in Paris.

Lawrence said, “Men invent means and methods of coming at God’s love, they learn rules and set up devices to remind them of that love, and it seems like a world of trouble to bring oneself into the consciousness of God’s Presence. Yet it might be so simple. Is it not quicker and easier just to do our common business wholly for the love of Him?”

Brother Lawrence found that he would connect with God more deeply in the kitchen, while scrubbing the dirty dishes, or while mopping the floors, than he would when he was in the monastery chapel participating in formal prayers and hymns. He still thought those things were important, too, but he did not want to limit his spirituality to the chapel. He wanted to experience God in every area of his life. And for him, most of his life was his work – his labor.

Lawrence said, “The time of work does not with me differ from the time of worship; and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, even while several people are at the same time calling out for different things, I commune with God in as great a tranquility as if I were upon my knees in prayer in the holiest cathedral of worship.”

For Brother Lawrence, our “common business,” no matter how mundane or routine, could be the primary medium through which God’s love could flow into our lives. The sacredness of the task, or worldly status of a task, mattered less than motivation behind it and the occupation of one’s thoughts while doing it.

Said Lawrence: “Nor is it needful that we should have great things to do...We can do little things for God; I turn the cake that is frying on the pan for love of Him, and that done, if there is nothing else to call me, I prostrate myself [on the kitchen floor] in worship before Him, who has given me grace to work; afterwards I rise happier than a king. It is enough for me to pick up but a piece of trash from the ground for the love of God.”

I wonder if today, you might “Practice the Presence of God”, like Brother Lawrence did, by constantly centering your thoughts around God’s love and character as you work – by constantly talking to God in prayer while you work, and listening for God’s response in your mind and heart as you work.

From the Old Testament, Ecclesiastes 9:10 says, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.”

And from the New Testament, Colossians 3:17 & 23: “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the Name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him... Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as if working for the Lord, and not for men.”

Think of one task you have to do today at work: visit a client, change the oil, serve a meal, run a wire, unload a container, change a diaper, repair a pipe – any one task you have to do today. Now, take 11 seconds to pray and ask God to help you be mindful of His loving, supportive Presence with you in that task. Ask Him to help you to be able to practice the Presence of God today while doing your various tasks.