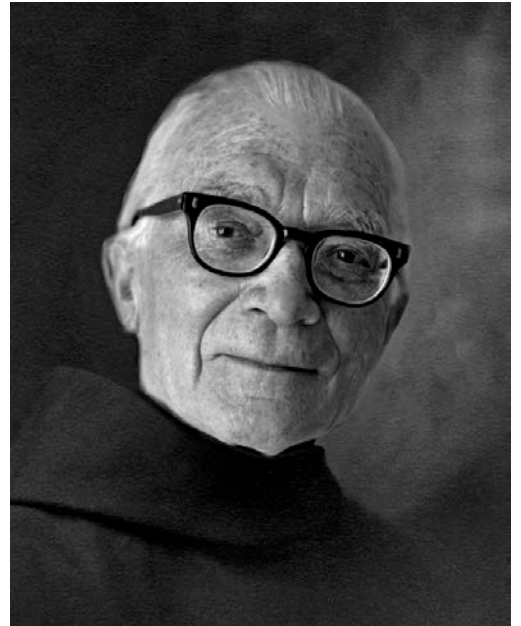


A Matter of the Heart: A Loving Word From Brother Leo to His Brothers

Listen, brother. Open your heart, and keep it open, to what comes to you from all your brothers. You come to the monastery in order to grow. You cannot grow unless you agree to be challenged by your brothers. Obedience to God is essentially obedience (that is, listening and taking to heart) to everything that life will bring, in a special way through your brothers, but also through other circumstances in your life. God speaks to you by these means.

Open your *heart*. Your happiness as a monk, your progress toward becoming a whole human being, is a matter of the heart. It is not so much a matter of an intellectual decision of your will (though that is also involved), as it is a matter of your heart. Be a monk with both heart and soul. Be a loving, feeling person. The heart is the living core of a person. In the words of Romano Guardini, it is "where the Spirit enters the flesh and blood, where the Spirit is owned and assimilated by the organic body, where the body comes close to the Spirit and becomes ready to be transformed," or lifted up to the Spirit. The heart is the very core and center of the person.



In the first place, pray. It is God Himself who speaks to you, who wants you to grow, to be happy, to be whole, to be a true human being, open to what God is willing to give you, which is God's own self. So never cease praying. Enjoy your prayer, be silent before God, empty before Him, opening up more and more to His inspiration.

And then, be ready and willing to follow that inspiration. "Now is the hour for us to rise from sleep" (RB Prologue 8; Rom. 13:11). Let us open the eyes of our heart to the light which wants to make us like unto God. Let us open the ear of our heart to the voice of God, being thunderstruck by it — today — now. The present moment is the one in which you should respond. Do not fantasize a tomorrow; do not be nostalgic about the past. Respond to the moment: "O that today you would listen to God's voice! Harden not your heart" (Ps. 95: 8). The psalmist asks: "Who is the one who longs for life and wants to see good days? Then keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn aside from evil and do good. Seek and strive after peace" (Ps. 34: 13-15). Then God's eyes will be lovingly upon you, and even before you call, God says: "I am already here!" God cares for us, and loves us. God wants to live with us and in us. In the words of Rabbi Abraham Heschel, God is "in search of us."

So let us be brave. Bravery is essentially the willingness and readiness to "let go," to give up the securities which we have built around us. Building securities around us really stems from insecurity. A secure person is also courageous. And letting go means, in the last analysis, giving oneself into the loving hands of God. "It is by the grace of God that I am who I am" (I Cor. 15:10). By letting go, we shall gain that higher security which rests in God, and of which the Lord Jesus speaks in the Sermon on the Mount: "Such a one will be like a wise person who built a house on rock; floods will come, storms will blow. The house will not tumble, because it is built on solid rock" (Mt. 7: 24f.).

Remember that God is patient. God knows that we grow in steps and in time, and God waits. God desires that we become more and more whole in the course of our lives.

All this is matter for the *entire* human being. We must prepare heart and body; both body and spirit are involved. Let God's life penetrate the last fibers of our being, our bodily being.

Thus the monastery becomes a school for truly serving God. While it is never harsh or bitter, it does require a willingness to give up, to let go, to serve. This is understandably more difficult at the beginning. Yet as we progress in our endeavor as monks, the heart is enlarged and widened. We run with inexpressible joy in pursuing this way of life in and for God. We are truly "in Christ": partakers of his life and heirs of his kingdom of freedom and happiness, to which his life, death, and resurrection lead us.

This article is an excerpt from a reflection on the Rule of Benedict, written by Brother Leo in the mid-1970s.

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