

From the Letters of Fr. Lawrence to Br. Anastasius in the Seminary

My Dear Johnny,

Your letter made me very happy. Since I haven't heard your voice for a long time, the first thing I did was to listen to your voice. I heard it and it reassured me. You bring up some problems, problems that God gave you to deal with. As you try to solve these problems and perhaps even struggle with them, you become stronger, your mind and maybe also your heart are being shaped and formed. The problems you write about are worth pondering—to some extent. To some extent only, because you will find a full answer only as the result of a life long process of learning.

Here is an important and good question (of yours): “Under the pretext of a vocation am I not just seeking myself in a sublimated fashion?” I wish others, too, would ask this question. No doubt, at the beginning one seeks mainly himself: he puts on God's robes and enjoys looking at himself. And yet, he does not seek only himself. In fact, he appreciates the robes, but he also appreciates God, or else, he would not put on His robes. It is true, though, that we should strive to seek and love God for His own sake. We will reach this stage only if we do not seek our own glory. This is the crucial point, not to seek my own glory. I may seek what is good for me since God, too, intends what is good for me. But I should not seek my own glory because “*qui gloriatur, in Domino gloriatur*—he who glories should glory in the Lord.” Also, I should seek God's concerns for me and for others. If I am concerned with what interests God, I will also seek my own interest in the right way. It is quite true that there are many who never ask themselves this question (“do I actually seek myself?”) and are offended at anyone who might express such a suspicion. In reality, you will find this (self-seeking) everywhere among humans. [...].

“What will become of me? I have a little talent for everything, but no real talent for anything” – you ask. That's a question of those people who want everything, all at once; knowledge and good judgment, theory and practice, inner life and outward success. Inordinate craving is at the root (of such an attitude). Concentrate on the task at hand. Go as deep as you can. Stop trying to become an expert in a lot of things so that you may become good at some. Our abilities are finite; so we should limit our existence to what we have received. We are meant to become a member in the Body, not everything. I should find my task within the Body and fulfill that task. So, go step by step. At any rate, strive to be thorough. Do not seek instant success and fast results. Lay down the foundations. [...].

So much for the time being, my dear Johnny. The Blessed Mother is with you, you too, be with her. Many times I offer you to her and she is so good that she accepts it. Love the Body whose Head cares for you and nourishes you with His blood. Be a good member of Him, grow strong. If you cannot resolve a problem, then, above everything else, pray and ask for a solution from the Blessed Mother. She will certainly put things in order in your mind. I am at peace about you. You are full of mischief, but I believe that grace will bring forth something good even out of that (mischievousness). Strive for truthfulness. Do not embellish yourself (your self-image). Accept the fact that you do not see the solution (to a problem) rather than force it. As a rule, things must mature slowly. Don't crave too much. You always make me happy if you write. I store it up in my soul and offer it many times to the Blessed Mother. By the time you will get a reply, I will have talked it over many times with her. You too, please pray for us so that we also may live.

I embrace you with much love,

M.

My Dear Johnny,

Your long awaited and long written letter arrived and brought happiness for me and safety for your endangered ears.

You can write beautifully, my dear Johnny, you warm up my eyes. This is not your fault but my weakness. I shed tears easily when I see something good, human goodness but even more when I perceive the gifts of God's infinite goodness. My being moved gives thanks for your striving for goodness but even more for God's electing, educating and adorning graces.

But you know, don't you, that the beautiful words, the skillfully crafted articulate sentences, the intelligent and humble speech are not enough. It is not enough that your dress looks sharp and elegant when you appear in a letter before me. More important is the endurance, the tough conquest of the self, the patience in seeking the truth and the effort to love. It does not matter if on weekdays you look unkempt: the fighting soul has no time to dress nice.

I am glad you remembered a request of mine that you may never compromise with yourself. Now I tell you more. Watch out that you do not make the Lord wait for you. He is good, patient and gracious and He is even ready to accommodate you with roundabout routes but it would not be nice for us to make Him wait. It is worthwhile to accompany Him. Many times he does not say where he is taking us; He is often in a hurry and we are huffing and puffing, but afterwards it becomes clear that it was worthwhile to go with Him.

If you can do it easily, write also at other times. It is good sometimes to put on a festive dress. At such occasions you watch yourself in the mirror and that is also good at times.

My dear Johnny, be good. I pray for you with much love. I trust you and I beg the Lord that you may not sadden Him. I am also looking forward to meeting you in the summer when your eyes will tell me again everything.

Love,

M.

My Dear Son,

I also read your letter with eyes warm with tears: it seems that we have become such teary-eyed people in our present misery. I don't know what it is in us that makes us cry: the distance which separates us or the love that binds us together and does not let us be separated from each other? I believe it is both; while you were close and I saw you daily you received my love in the shape of scolding. Now that you are far away, I embrace you in spirit – how could I scold you – and cry when I hear your voice. I believe though that this is not the real cause for our crying: these are cries of joy because the good God is infinitely merciful to us, and even when punishing us, he teaches, heals and embraces us with infinite tenderness. It is impossible for us not to see how his divine power and grace is working in us and also in you. This is the great joy that is why one weeps because, look, how good God truly is.

Every line of your letter reassures me. I see from it how you stand before God, how you think in His presence, what you think about Him, about His ways and His will. I pray my dear Son that you may not only see but also believe. Seeing is already a reward. Sometimes it is like an advance payment but it is always a reward. Faith is what merits: “Blessed are those who did not see and yet believed” – so spoke the Lord to Thomas. That you are able to understand God's ways so often is a reward. If not understanding (his ways) you still believe and obey, that is merit. “*Obedientes fidei.*” Abraham believed God and was ready to fulfill the hard and unintelligible command: sacrifice his son. Obedience to God's commandments is wisdom, the way to happiness. This is what I ask you from the Lord. You too, please ask for it.

I continue my letter after two weeks. Since then its paper got wrinkled a bit but not the love with which I think of you. My pen too is pouring out ink abundantly, but, of course, at other times I have been pressing it in vain. So frail is matter, the flesh, but our love is not from flesh and blood but from the grace of the Lord with which we love God and everything and everyone that belongs to Him.

Study much and gladly. Don't take time away from prayer; enjoy sitting at the Master's feet, but when it is time for studies, study as much as you can. Study intelligently, chew on it; don't try to understand everything, but leave something for future times, for the school of life experience and for the time when your personality will have matured. In the beginning we know things from the outside and only later do we penetrate their depth. The young know perhaps more details now, but later you will see more clearly what is essential.

For the summer you might want to find some kind of practical job so that you are not separated from life and from people. The seminary creates a bubble for you, which has great advantages but also some disadvantages. Of course, as soon as you are out, I am expecting you very much. Don't let me wait long for you.

How is your health? Be moderate, he who has a weak spring should not stretch it too far. Find out what is harmful and what is good for your health so that you may provide for it, as much as possible, what it needs. [...]

I am finishing now, Son, because my pen is flowing irreparably and besides, I have nothing else to write about. Pray for us and pray for me too as I do not forget you either and may God bless you.

Love

M.

[The following is only a fragment of a letter.]

Ananiah asked the Lord: “do you want a child like this to be ordained a priest?” The Lord answered: “Go because I chose him to be an instrument to proclaim my name to the believing unbelievers, the unbelieving believers, and to the spoiled little princes, the children. I will show him how much he will have to suffer for me” (Acts 9:15).

The yoke of the Lord is sweet, his burden light, only we are a heavy burden for ourselves as long as we do not die to ourselves. The *vetus homo* [old man] agonizes in us for a long time and that is tough. But the *novus homo*'s [new man] every heartbeat is invigorating, strengthening and encouraging. Our trail is winding between joy and pain but the joy always wins out. That is resurrection.

The Lord said to John: “Behold your mother.” You, too, should tell her: “Behold your son.” May the saint of Clairvaux and this short writing in the attachment help you: “*Ipsam sequens non devias... Ipsa propitia pervenis...* If you follow her, you will not go astray... if she is gracious to you, you will arrive...”

I too extend my hand over your head that the spirit of the priesthood may descend upon you. I will also ask for the imposition of your hands so that I too may share in the grace the child has received.

Love,

M.