



Pope Leo XIV arrives in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican for his weekly general audience Dec. 10, 2025. (AP/Andrew Medichini)



by Carol Zimmermann

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Twice in recent weeks Pope Leo XIV has brought up a book that essentially spells out his spiritual MO.

When asked in a Dec. 2 [in-flight press conference](#) about what was on his mind during the [conclave](#), Leo credited a book he had read "many years ago" that highlighted "a type of prayer and spirituality where one simply gives his life to the Lord and allows the Lord to lead."

The book, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, is only about 100 pages (depending on the edition) but it seems to pack a spiritual punch. It was first published in 1692 the year after the author — simply known as Brother Lawrence, a lay Carmelite brother in France — died at the age of 77.

Seven days after Leo's press conference, this book got another papal shout-out. When a reporter [outside the papal residence at Castel Gandolfo in Italy](#) asked Leo if he prayed at the Blue Mosque in Turkey during his recent visit (reports said he hadn't), he again referred to this 17th-century book, saying he already spoke about this on the plane. "Who said that I didn't pray?" he added, along with the sidenote: "It could be that I am praying right now."

Reading between the lines about the book's theme of constant conversation with God, then sure, he could have been praying — without looking like it — at the mosque or even this impromptu press gaggle.

Although praying while being interviewed takes multitasking to a new level, it also tracks with the message of Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection (his full chosen name) who prayed while cooking, washing dishes, going out to order wine and repairing sandals at the Discalced Carmelite monastery in Paris — Saint-Joseph-des-Carmes.



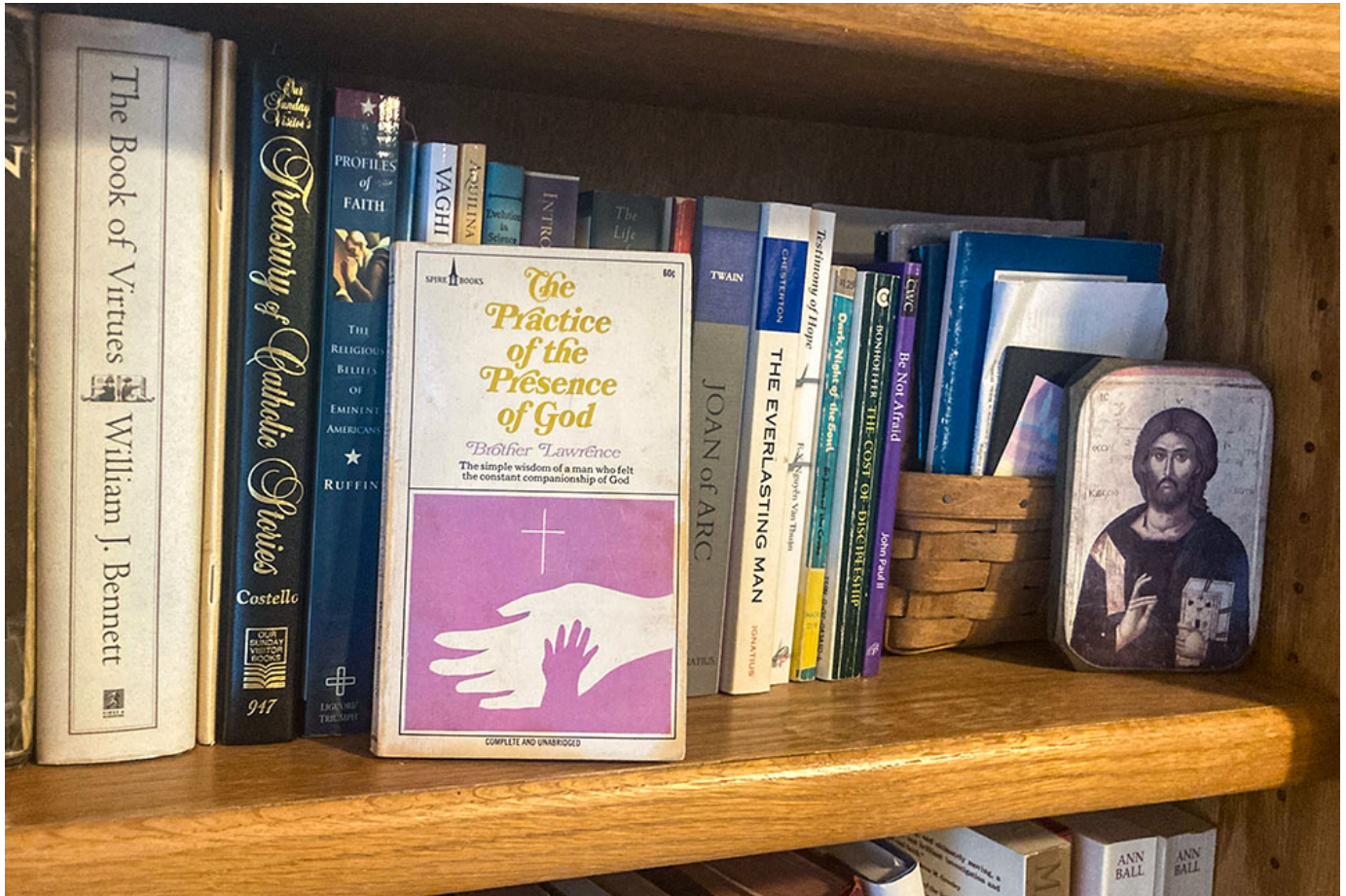
Saint-Joseph-des-Carmes Church in Paris is seen in a print from circa 1655, during the lifetime of Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection. (Wikimedia Commons/Rijksmuseum)

A Carmelite historian told me that Lawrence, born Nicholas Herman, arrived at the monastery physically and spiritually wounded after fighting in the Thirty Years' War. He never sat down to write his famous book, but it is full of his ideas. It includes recounted conversations he had with a local priest, Fr. Joseph de Beaufort, who later became vicar general to the archbishop of Paris, and it ends with letters Lawrence wrote describing how prayer was a major part of his daily routine.

"It's a very simple book by someone who doesn't even give his last name," the pope told reporters on his return trip from Lebanon, saying this also answered a question he had been asked about a book that would help people understand him.

"If you want to know something about me, that's been my spirituality for many years, in the midst of great challenges — living in Peru, during years of terrorism, being called to service in places where I never thought I would be called to serve to — I trust in God."

While editing our coverage of the plane press conference, I thought, "Wait, I know this book," remembering it because my mom had also been a fan. Later, I pulled out her 1972 edition of *The Practice of the Presence of God*, with its 60-cent price printed on the cover, from a bookshelf's pared-down collection of my parents' religious books from their years of living with us.



A 1972 edition of Brother Lawrence's *The Practice of the Presence of God* that belonged to Marge MacLeod sits on a bookshelf in the home of her daughter Carol Zimmermann. (NCR photo/Carol Zimmermann)

My mom had told me how Lawrence prayed all the time, even when he did the dishes, which I thought was a quaint way for her to encourage me to get more out of mundane chores. But after finally reading this book just last weekend — and putting it in context of Leo's remarks — the always-praying concept seems a bit more radical.

From his own account, the pope prayed and trusted in God in both unexpected places and in some likely scary situations, which brings the whole conversation with

God up a notch. It also explains how Leo would again turn to this practice when it seemed he was about to be chosen to lead the world's 1.4 billion Catholics.

Recounting the [conclave's wrap-up](#), Leo told reporters he took a deep breath and said: "Here we go, Lord, you're in charge, you lead the way." In other words, he kept that spiritual conversation going in the hallowed Sistine Chapel voting room while throngs waited for [white smoke](#) in St. Peter's Square and around the world.

Carmelite Fr. Leopold Glueckert, historian and retired teacher living in Chicago, had not been aware of the pope's endorsement of the humble Carmelite writer, but he was not at all surprised by it. He called it "typical," saying the way the pope operates — not making snap judgements, thinking things over before speaking and choosing his words carefully — is "vintage Lawrence."

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Glueckert has his own connection to Leo as the weekend celebrant during the 1980s at the now-closed Chicago parish St. Mary of the Assumption, which [the pope's family, the Prevosts](#), attended. At the time, the future pope was off at school, but Glueckert said his parents were "any pastor's dream. They volunteered for everything and were very regular in taking Communion to the sick."

Regarding Leo's book recommendation, the historian noted that the priest who compiled these conversations with Lawrence had to have rushed home after talking with the kitchen friar to write down as much as he could remember. Beaufort probably would have benefited from today's recording and transcribing tools, but he still seemed to get the gist of Lawrence's spirituality that has gained him followers centuries later.

Glueckert said Lawrence had a captive audience for his "methodless method" of prayer that he talked up with other cooks and dishwashers, delivery workers, fish mongers and grocers who may have also had a "simple, down-to-earth interest in praying but weren't sure they could successfully do it."



An illustration from a 1900 book depicts Brother Lawrence in the kitchen. (Wikimedia Commons)

The book has been popular with Protestants as well — said to be a favorite of Methodism movement founder John Wesley and Anglican author [C.S. Lewis](#), who grew to like the book even if he wasn't initially sold on it. The broad appeal, according to Glueckert, is its simple, direct style of prayer — nothing about saints or sacraments — in other words, "no middle man to God."

More than 300 years later, people are still reading it. It has a Goodreads community [score](#) of 4.3 stars out of five with nearly 58,000 ratings. And now, it could now be selling more copies after the pope's mention — similar to the "Oprah effect" on book sales. Carson Daly, a co-host of "The Today Show" on NBC, said on air that he is reading the book and he thanked the pope for its recommendation when he met him Dec. 5 before the Vatican's Christmas concert.

Louis DiCocco, president of St. Jude Shop, located just outside of Philadelphia, said his third-generation shop has seen some traction and increased sales of *The Practice of the Presence of God*, currently [listed](#) with Pope Leo XIV items on the store's website.

It doesn't surprise him that the pope, who went to college at nearby Villanova University, would talk about such a practical spiritual book.

And the book's relatable style is no doubt part of its appeal. As theologian James K.A. Smith [said](#) in a review of a more modern translation of the book: "Imagine Mr. Rogers was a mystic. That will give you a sense of the warm spiritual heart of Brother Lawrence."

As Glueckert sees it, that approach is certainly a welcome one today. "Most people need something of this sort. It's attainable. This is a guy they can reach — St. John of the Cross, not so much," he said, referring to another Carmelite, the 16th-century Spanish mystic who wrote *The Dark Night of the Soul* — yet another paperback in my mom's collection.