

Difficulties in Prayer

Distractions & Dryness

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Goal of Prayer

When we talk about prayer, we talk about the **time** we have **available** to devote to it

- **Preparation & availability** are needed for a **life of prayer**;
- We move from **punctual prayer** to a **time of prayer** with the **goal of developing a life of prayer**;
- **Goal of prayer** is to learn to **live our entire life in God's presence** or **prayer without ceasing**;
- God never leaves us. We leave him. We **forget** that he is there.

Silent Prayer

Living in God's Presence

- It's a **habitual awareness** of God, wherever we are, we are with our Lord;
- It's an **acute awareness** that nothing in our lives happens without him;
- It allows us to be **aware of our lives**;
- We can't **hide** from God.

**Difficulties
in the
Practice of Prayer**

**Distractions
&
Contemplative
Dryness**

- **Distractions.** What happens?
- In the **beginning** of our spiritual life, there is an intensity at the time of conversion;
- We turned towards God & took our **Baptismal life** seriously;
- Our soul enjoyed a sensory fervor.

Graces

God
is a
very savvy
Teacher

- God knows that we have left worldly things behind;
- When God takes away our **worldly pleasures**, he must keep our senses occupied with something else;
- He delights us with **sensory fervor** that makes practicing spiritual exercises easy & pleasurable.

Virtues

We are
carried by grace
God
has replaced
what
we let go of

- It is **easy in the beginning** to go to mass, to spend hours in prayer, to recite the rosary, to meditate on God's word;
- This state **doesn't last very long**;
- The **sensory consolations** are quickly **withdrawn**. We **feel nothing**;
- We are now in a state of **aridity and dryness**.

Why are we
experiencing aridity?

God takes away
Sensory Desires
&
gives us
Spiritual Desires

- Our Lord sees we are more interested in what we feel or can control than in him;
- He wants to **raise us up** from an **inferior way of loving** to a **higher way of loving**;
- This is hard for us. We are not used to what God is giving us;
- We are still attached to sensory desires. The change casts us into the **night**.

Aridity

Spiritual or
Contemplative
Dryness
is a
**Necessary
Passage**

- We get nothing from meditation, **everything is dry!** We are **lost**;
- God wants to move us from **meditation to contemplation**;
- Aridity is a form of **relationship with God** according to the spirit;
- Dryness is not a time of abandonment by God. He is calling us to go further.

Rituals

Will we allow
ourselves to be **led
along** this **spiritual
path**

or

will we **remain
attached** to the
sensory world?

- Rituals **block the anointing of the Holy Spirit** who wants to take them further;
- It's important to be **flexible** with the Holy Spirit;
- At a certain point, we enter a **holy passivity**;
- We need to take this road.

3 Criteria

Not all
Dryness
comes from
God

- Spiritual dryness from the Holy Spirit has **criteria**;
- St. John gives us 3 criteria to discern the origin of dryness;
- **God takes away the sensory graces** that gave strength to move forward. A **weaning** takes place;
- John of the Cross gives us **three signs** to determine if the **dryness is from God**.

First Sign

We are no longer
interested
or comforted by the
things of
God
or
the things of
the **World**

- We are **no longer interested** in the **things of God** (Mass, praying, meditating or Word of God), but we are **no longer interested** in the **things of the world** either;
- For the **dryness to be from God** there must be a **lack of consolation** in the **Godly** and in the **earthly**;
- God puts the soul in a **dark night** to **purge** and **dry out** its **sensory appetites** so God can give it something **better**;
- The first sign then is about **letting go of sin**.

Second Sign

We remember God with
longing

We have an **overwhelming
worry** we aren't
serving him

We are **regressing** as
we have no **interest in
things of God**

- We have the memory of God & are **not indifferent** towards **him**. We **think about him**. We **worry** we aren't **serving** him well & are regressing. We are **ill at ease**;
- The **depressive personality** is **completely indifferent to God**. This soul has no interest in God nor does it have crippling worry;
- **Indifference** isn't associated with worry about the things of God. This distinguishes between **depression & contemplative dryness**;
- The soul experiencing **purifying dryness** has **desire, worry & pain** at not serving God. This is the difference between **spiritual dryness & indifference**;
- In **dryness**, there is a lack of **desire** but **worry** about God & desire to **serve** him. In **depression** there is total disgust & no desire to serve God. At this level, we struggle with **indifference**.

Third Sign

Soul can
no longer
Meditate
Or
Reflect
with the
Imagination

- We are entering the **grace of contemplative prayer**;
- There is **active prayer, meditation, internal reflection** & then through grace **contemplative prayer** with its different degrees: quiet, union & transformation.

God communicates
with the Spirit

I look
at him
&
He looks
at me

- We need to accept that our senses are as if paralyzed;
- We haven't grasped the spiritual process under way;
- We are **lost**. We are in the **night**;
- We are incapable of recollecting our senses.

Passage from
Meditation to
Contemplation

This Phenomenon
described by
St. John of the
Cross
**Revolutionized
Mystical Theology**

- St. John tells us what **attitudes** to take on;
- We can't force things;
- It's the **passage** from **human activity** to **passivity** under the **action** of the **Holy Spirit**;
- We need **let go & let God & consent** to enter this **spiritual passivity**.

The Passive Night

St. John
describes
the **behavior**
we need
to adopt

- In the **Ascent of Mount Carmel**, St. John tells us to:
- **impose silence** on our operation by the senses. This is the **passage from human activity to the action of the Holy Spirit**;
- **strive to empty ourselves** of all imagination and knowledge;
- **establish ourselves faith**;
- **remain at rest in a loving attention to God**;
- **persevere with patience in prayer** without taking any action;
- **strive not to get upset** at seeing the powers deprived of their operation, be happy about it.

**Holy Passivity
is very Difficult**

We want to do
a lot for God,
but now
God wants to do
something for us

- In daily life, we really like to be of service, we don't like to be served;
- We are always ready to serve others;
- This happens in prayer too; and we must peacefully let it happen.

Story of the Little Bird

Teresa of the Little
Flower
experienced
Dryness
in a radical way in
the
Night of Faith

All he can do is to raise his little wings,
but to fly away isn't in his power.
What will he become, full of sadness and
seeing himself so powerless?
No, the little bird will not despair and with an
audacious abandonment, he remains before
the divine sun, nothing will frighten him,
not the wind, or the rain.
If clouds appear that hide the loving star, the
little bird won't move.
He knows that behind the clouds, his sun
continues to shine. His brilliance will not be
eclipsed for even a second.
It's true that sometimes the heart of the little
bird finds itself overcome by the storm. He
seems not to believe that anything else
exists besides the clouds that engulf him.
It's the moment of perfect joy for the poor
little, weak being. What happiness for him
to stare at the invisible light that hides from
his faith.

God's love for us
is Certain

God lives
beyond the
region of the
Senses &
Intelligence

- It's **faith** that puts us into contact with the sun. The only way to **reach God & unite with him**;
- The dark knowledge of faith is certain & leads the soul into the darkness of the senses;
- The **supernatural penetration of God** can happen without giving us any insight, feeling, or awareness of it;
- **We don't feel it.** Accept it and live this contact with God uniquely by faith which **increases the supernatural life** in us, the **richness of charity**.

If God exists then...

Why do we tend
to doubt
God's existence
when faced
with trials?

- It's about entering **pure faith** that has no tangible support;
- It's here that our transformation in God takes place; we become spiritual beings;
- We enter the **very beginning of contemplative life**;
- It isn't transformative union but rather **recollection** of the **senses**;
- Contemplative life according to St. John is a loving knowledge, not an intellectual knowledge.

Contemplation

The Intellect
receives

Divine Insight

into

God's

Hidden Wisdom

- It's a **loving knowledge**, not an understanding of God;
- Contemplation is obscure; a **hidden & secret wisdom**;
- Without the noise of words or the help of bodily or spiritual senses as in the silence & quiet of the night;
- God teaches the soul in a very hidden & secret way. This is **contemplation**.

Contemplation

A Science of Love
or a
Loving & Infused
Knowledge
of
God

- We don't know how God teaches us. It's a **secret way**;
- It's the old farmer; he knows God from **experience**, he can't explain it;
- Bernadette never went to school;
- Therese, never studied theology, was taught by God in a hidden way;
- God alone can reveal himself to us; God takes the initiative & introduces us into his mystery. This is **contemplative life**.

Perfection
is not within
Man's Reach

The only **Worry**
we should have
is whether
we **live** for
& are moved by
Love

- We often have an active life, we can be active in our prayer life. We think we are in **control**;
- God allows us to know him & infuses a loving knowledge of himself into us which **shines a light** on the **soul** & causes it to **burn with love**;
- It's only **love** that **unites & attaches** the **soul** to God;
- It's not about **being perfect**. It's about being in **love**;
- When we aren't coming from love, we are unsavory. **Love refines us**.

This is Contemplation

An **Elevated Place**
where
God begins
to show &
communicate
himself
in this life

- St. John tells us that contemplation is a **secret infusion**, full of peace & calm, where the soul **drinks** the **water** of wisdom, love & suavity;
- **Contemplation** is an influence of God in the soul; God invades us by his **purifying presence**;
- Contemplation is a serene night for sensory & natural intelligence; a secret wisdom which communicates & infuses itself through **love**; it's the **language of God**.
- God has granted this degree to the **humblest of souls**.

Theological Wisdom & Mystical Wisdom

Theological Wisdom
helps us to approach &
look for God.

At a certain point,

Theological
gives way to

Mystical Wisdom

which allows us to

Penetrate Deeper

into the

Mystery

- Mystical wisdom doesn't depend on intellectual knowledge. You must want it;
- Our Baptism is about entering the mystery of God;
- **Contemplation** is our **Goal**. We can't prevent its **coronation**.

Throughout
Church History

We have taken
Spirituality
away from the
Faithful
and hidden it in
Monasteries

- Spirituality was reserved for the **elite** which explains why people went looking for answers in the **Orient**;
- The message was if you want to live a spiritual life you must go to the convent;
- All that we are looking for in Orient, we have in the **treasure** of the Church;
- The **mistake** was thinking that spirituality wasn't for the **people in the pews**.

People are thirsty
for God

We need to
anchor ourselves
in the **Treasure**
of the **Faith**,
in the **Treasure**
of **Baptismal grace**,
in the **Treasure** of
Contemplation

- Those responsible in the Church were **afraid** that spirituality would be accessible to all;
- We must **liberate** our spirituality & open the doors of monasteries & give it back to the people;
- This explains why worldly people laugh at us and ask what we have more than they do;
- We aren't going to the **height of our vocation**, we aren't living out the richness of the grace of our **Baptism**.

Fight the Distractions

When Meditating
in the Beginning

Fight the
Distractions

If we don't try to
overcome them,
we will never
be able to
Meditate

- If you apply what we have discussed here, you will find that you have far fewer distractions in prayer;
- At the stage of contemplation we can let the distractions go;
- Therese says about the little bird...this imperfect creature allowed itself to be distracted ...she is describing the dissipation that she experienced;
- Teresa of Avila said - Very often, for several years, I was more preoccupied by the desire to see the hour end & to hear the clock chime, than other thoughts.

Entering Prayer

The **Living Memory** Of **God**

must accompany me
all day & if so,

Entering Prayer
will be **Easy**

- It all depends on the **preparation**. It's important to take a few minutes to quiet down before beginning prayer or I will be distracted;
- If I haven't thought of God all day & I try to enter prayer, I will experience distractions;
- Adequate preparation will help us engage in prayer & have fewer distractions;
- We need to take care of our prayer lives, our meeting with God, it's a **sacred exercise** that **deserves** the **investment** of our **whole heart**.