

ARIDITY

We are familiar with the word 'drought' which means dry or without water. The word "aridity" signifies dryness, drought, without water, a desert etc.

Spiritual journey or spiritual life is like our physical life that goes through ups and downs. There are moments one feels elated and enthusiastic and there are moments one feels utterly abandoned or has no enthusiasm. Spiritual aridity is a condition of soul in which a person derives no consolation or satisfaction from prayer, spiritual practice or any other devotion. This absence of spiritual gratification makes very difficult for one to produce the intellectual and affective acts of prayer or even prayerful imagination. According to spiritual writers, aridity may be due to different causes. It may be caused by such infidelity to God's grace as lukewarmness in the service of God, habitual venial sin, habits of sensuality, vain curiosity, inconstancy, superficiality, lack of esteem for spiritual goods, or excessive activism.

Aridity may result also from the physical discomfort caused by sickness, by heat or cold, or by the lack of sufficient sleep. Yet, many a time it is attributed to our physical condition of health and energy.

Or it may be the effect of the mental uneasiness caused by worry, family problems, absorbing occupations, overwork, or a lack of the natural ability for a particular method of prayer. Certain mental or emotional problems also may cause aridity in the spiritual life. Father Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalene, O.C.D. writes in no. 153 of *Divine Intimacy*: "...there comes a time when the soul is deprived of all sensible consolation. This suppression of

sensible devotion is the state of aridity, which may have various causes. Sometimes it is the result of infidelity on the part of those who little by little have become lax, allowing themselves many slight satisfactions and pleasures and giving in to their curiosity, selfishness, or pride — which they had previously renounced.”

One can be certain that aridity may be sent by God to humble the soul and purify it of its excessive attachment to consolation in prayer. But if this aridity is accompanied by the signs of purgative contemplation, by an inability to meditate upon the things of God, a disinclination to fix the mind on other objects, and an anxious solicitude about backsliding and not serving the Lord, then the dryness is an indication of a more accentuated divine influence. In this case, aridity manifests a divine call to enter upon a new, more simplified form of prayer—a *contemplative loving attentiveness to God*. Often this area of spiritual aridity is not discerned properly with the help of expert spiritual directors. Consequently many souls are misled on their path to perfection of charity.

When the aridity is caused by infidelity, a person may find the remedy in a greater diligence in his practices of the spiritual life and in a more careful effort to correct his defects. In the case of the aridity caused by physical discomfort or mental uneasiness, a person should seek the means for alleviating the causes of these ills. If this alleviation is not attainable, the endurance of the aridity can then be the occasion for the practice of greater virtue, especially patience. When purgative contemplation is the cause of the dryness, a person should not continue to try to meditate or force particular acts, but he should remain at peace, in a simple, loving

attentiveness to God in pure faith and love, without the desire to experience or feel anything. Although not feeling any consolation or experiencing any attraction for prayer, the soul should apply itself to it through its own powerlessness. St. Teresa of Avila says that “anyone who while trying by some ingenuity to remedy cannot make mental prayer should turn to vocal prayer, or reading, or colloquies with God, but should never fail to consecrate to prayer the time set apart for it” (*Way 18*).

One thing is very clear that spiritual life is a combination of both our life of grace and our daily active life. One cannot ignore one and live the other. There should be a blending of both types of life; of course it should be a life lived fully with the grace provided. That means one cannot neglect both spiritual as well as physical exercise/work in this process of spiritual growth. Aridity is a very common experience and no one should be embarrassed about it. If we are doing all we can to live the Gospel, mortify ourselves to control our unruly passions, and devote regular times daily to prayer even if prayer doesn't satisfy our senses; and if we humbly submit ourselves to His will in our lives, we are behaving in a loving way toward God. Is that not, after all, the most important thing?

The worst thing we can do is to abandon prayer because we don't get our shot of good feelings from it. In that case, praying has become about us and not about God. Is that love or selfishness?

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