



Digital Commons@

Loyola Marymount University
LMU Loyola Law School

Spiritual Essays

Center for Ignatian Spirituality

2014

Winter Solstice

Fr. Randy Roche

Loyola Marymount University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/spiritualessays>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Roche, Fr. Randy, "Winter Solstice" (2014). *Spiritual Essays*. 328.

<https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/spiritualessays/328>

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Ignatian Spirituality at Digital Commons @ Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spiritual Essays by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lmu.edu.

Winter Solstice

The date for Christmas was originally chosen as a celebration of Christ as light of the world being born on the day of the year when the daylight hours began again to increase. The calendar system has changed, so that the solstice and Christmas do not occur on exactly the same day. But the meaning is the same: Christ continues to be born into our world where the need is still great for more light in all our affairs and less darkness of thinking, speaking and acting.

Autumn often engenders in us associations with colorful leaves, brilliant sunlight, and crisp air, while the very name of winter evokes notions of cold and colder, and of darkness rather than bright light. And yet, as the season of winter begins, the hours of sunlight actually increase, while they were decreasing during the season of autumn. The benefits of having longer days do not occur until spring, some months away.

Much as we often desire immediate results, and could imagine that longer days should result right away in more warmth, we might know that such thinking is superficial: to live on this earth we need all that winter brings to us as much as the other three seasons. And we appreciate more the light of grace, experiences of love, and whatever else is good in our lives because of their contrast with the challenges and other negative experiences that also occur. We become the persons we are by our growth through all the seasons of life, not just the pleasant times.

The December solstice does not make the world immediately warmer and, no matter how deep our trust and love might be, our relationship with God does not always make our experiences of suffering instantly turn into occasions for joy. Often, we find that hopeful patience is for us a significant part of moving gracefully from darkness and confusion to the light of clarity for decision-making, or from a dark place of meaningless suffering to a brighter location where love is acknowledged as our defining purpose.

Solstice graces occur as changes in spiritual seasons, seasons that are not governed by the calendar but by the direct and personal movement of God within us. We realize that we have moved in a direction of increased light in mind and spirit, accompanied by diminished attention to self-interests or seeking approval of others. We have made a beginning, to be continued over time. Only when the season is well established are we able to recognize the significant consequences of our assent to an impulse, invitation or eminently reasonable idea that we received at the moment of "solstice." These experiences do not follow a definite time-frame. For one person, a graced change that takes on the characteristics of a spiritual season might be found

as a new freedom in conversing directly with God. For another, the change might be in finding the wherewithal to begin moderating diet, exercise, criticisms, or consistent fantasies.

For every winter solstice, there follows a summer solstice, where the days again grow shorter, moving towards increased hours of darkness. In terms of our relationship with God, any movement towards darkness that would mean less trust, hope or love could not be a gift or a grace. But challenges, disappointments, and all forms of suffering might initiate in us a kind of spiritual season. And these encounters, when we accept what we cannot change, and change what we can, are seasons of grace often recognized as such when we can look back at them.

Every spiritual season, and the graces that are received in them, are always oriented towards the light of Christ, as we might notice and accept at this blessed Christmas solstice.