



Digital Commons@

Loyola Marymount University
LMU Loyola Law School

Spiritual Essays

Center for Ignatian Spirituality

2013

Sweet or Dry

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, "Sweet or Dry" (2013). *Spiritual Essays*. 289.

<https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/spiritualessays/289>

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.

Sweet or Dry

Some wines are described as tasting sweet or dry, not sweet or sour. Sour wine is generally called vinegar. Sometimes our spiritual experiences might well be described as sweet or dry, since, as with wines, one is not good and the other bad, but they are different, and most of us have a preference for one rather than the other.

When we appreciate a beautiful scene, enjoy a meaningful conversation or have a moment of satisfying prayer, we might consider the experience to be "sweet," even though we might not use that word if we were to tell anyone about these events. When an apparently beautiful view does not evoke any feeling, or we have no feelings connected with a conversation that is truly of significance or find no joy in prayer that is yet a real connection with God, "dry" is one way to describe such occurrences. But even if we prefer sweet feelings to dry or to no feelings at all, we often find it more difficult to speak with others about the spiritual experiences that are more pleasing to us than those that are less pleasant. Perhaps we are spontaneously shy of talking about the moments in our lives that are touched with transcendence, and find it easier to tell others about those that seem more commonplace.

Though we can look at scenery or listen to beautiful music, we cannot force ourselves to feel appreciative. Similarly, we cannot know for certain the feelings that will follow after a conversation, or subsequent to a period of prayer. We are free to decide what we will do, but we are not able to choose the effects that might follow. The first advantage for us of this truth is: we might recognize that a spiritual gift is involved when we experience "sweetness" of some kind. Since we do not cause such feelings, they must be a consequence of something more than us, perhaps even a gentle movement of Spirit.

The second advantage to us of being able to decide upon our thoughts, words, and deeds but not having the power to determine our felt responses is that when dryness is involved, it is neither a fault nor a failure on our part. Occasions of dryness provide opportunities to reflect on whether or not our decisions were in accord with what we believed to be the right or appropriate thing to do. When we have honestly acted according to our understanding of what is better, dryness does not indicate being at odds with "the cosmos" nor the disfavor of God, but a reminder that whenever they occur, joy, peace, reverence and awe are gifts.

When our experiences are sweet, they affirm and confirm our ways of thinking and acting, and can easily lead to gratitude not only for the feelings that make it easy for us to continue in the same direction, but for the

personal care or presence of God that many of us perceive at such moments. Dryness does not appear at first to be supportive of our efforts, but such experiences provide us with some necessary opportunities to exercise trust in continuing to do whatever we believe to be right. We find out in practice that we are more interested in acting in accord with our minds and hearts than we are in the feelings that might or might not follow upon our actions. Accepting affective dryness is healthy, especially when compared with much of the physical, emotional and spiritual sickness in society that results when people try to take control of pleasurable feelings, by seeking "sweetness" in ways that are actually harmful.

Let the truly sweet experiences show us which way to proceed, not changing directions when later similar experiences seem dry. But in the dry times, remember the sweet, because those feelings, gifts of God, will again occur.