



Digital Commons@

Loyola Marymount University
LMU Loyola Law School

Spiritual Essays

Center for Ignatian Spirituality

2012

Can and Cannot

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, "Can and Cannot" (2012). *Spiritual Essays*. 268.

<https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/spiritualessays/268>

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.

Can and Cannot

With our freedom to choose, we can do many things, and there are others that we cannot manage no matter how much we try. If we only count as valuable the things that we can do, and consider all else as either failure or loss, we might miss a great number of very good gifts in life.

Frustration is a temporary experience. As soon as we let something be as it is, whether we made a mistake, others disappointed us, or we could not accomplish what we wanted, we can then begin to imagine another possibility. If we cannot make the sun come out, and cold weather occurs when we had planned an outdoor gathering, we might exercise our organizational skills for getting everything and everyone moved inside, and become creative about seeking ways for guests to enjoy the newly shaped gathering. At times, our intentions are challenged by the circumstances over which we have no control, but we lose nothing just because we cannot change them. We always have an option of looking for what we can do, and focusing our attention in that direction.

Some people say that they cannot reflect on their experience, and that their minds wander down aimless paths of thoughts about nothing unless they are actively "doing something." Rather than consider the apparent inability as a permanent state, all of us can try some experiments, and find out which might be of benefit for us now. For some, taking a few, conscious deep breaths will allow a brief pause in runaway thinking for just one remembrance of a success and a cause for gratitude. The most helpful experiment of all is also the most simple and direct: to begin with the interior words, "I can," and follow that with an expression of honest desire. An example: "I can find a way that will work for me." Believing in possibilities, rather than limiting our thoughts to that which we cannot do, keeps us open to the kinds of surprises in life that bring us joy.

If we consider prayer as communication between two persons, any of us could truthfully say "I cannot pray," for we cannot carry on a conversation all by ourselves. But we can try to initiate a conversation with another person, and we can seek communication with God. And while there might be some people who will have nothing to do with us, God is always delighted to be with us anytime, anywhere. The only real obstacle to prayer is to deny that the Other could be interested in us, the same belief that often prevents people from seeking to initiate a conversation with anyone they would like to know.

We can desire to pray, and to have interior experiences that encourage and support us in choosing what is better rather than less good. Since we are

familiar with modes of communication that we use with humans, we can employ them as analogies when we pray, but not as complete paradigms. God is beyond us, but also within us, which radically and positively affects the ways we can communicate. No matter how many methods we have of being electronically connected with others, or of exchanging wordless heartfelt messages when we are present to one another, only with God do we experience words, and, more often, wordless inspirations, that arise within us as real communication. We could be in a crowded room, and no one seeing us would know or perceive that we are in touch with God.

As an expression of a helpful attitude, "can" takes precedence over "cannot."