

Overcoming Dryness In Prayer

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Hi, I'm Father Steven Borello, and I'm grateful you're here joining us for this final week of our pray more healing online retreat. Let's begin in prayer.

Opening Prayer

Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Amen. Good and gracious Father, you know all things, you know how I struggle, you know Father how I want to give up when times become difficult or dry. And so I just ask for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit for that gift of fortitude, that I would be confident and trust deeply in your love for me. Mother Mary, we entrust this time to your hands. We entrust all of our prayers to your hands that you would seek from the hands of the Father, every gift and blessing as we pray. Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death, Amen. Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Amen.

Running and Hiding

So, in the last episodes, we've looked at both fear and suffering and how they both invite us to deep intimacy with God. I think we can also acknowledge that in these places, there are going to be moments of struggle and dryness, not because we're doing anything wrong. Well, sometimes we are, but we'll talk about that. But because in being human, these are areas that require great vulnerability from us, and vulnerability takes time to cultivate. It takes trust to cultivate. And so there is a learning and a growing and trust that God himself is faithful and trustworthy.

And this is very important because what is it that Satan did with Adam and Eve is that Satan whispers against God's fatherliness. He whispers against God's trustworthiness. It is in the whispering of Satan that Adam and Eve doubt that God is good, which makes it hard for them to run to God. Instead of turning back to the Lord after their sin, they run, and they hide. They hide from the Lord who wants to meet them in their woundedness and their place of pain. And then this is true for all of us. We've inherited and we've heard, and we've listened to the lie that God is not good. And our vulnerability and bringing to the Lord these places of fear, these places of suffering, it moves us to a place of encounter with the love of God and encountering that love of God, we ourselves are experiencing a truth. The truth that God is good, that God is faithful, that God is trustworthy, that God himself desires us.

The Sources of Dryness and How to Respond to Them

So, during these places of dryness, during these places where there is frustration in our life of prayer, we want to be aware that we are leaning into a truth and into a gift and into a relationship that Satan from the very beginning has tried to undermine. And that most of us, from a very young age, we didn't have parents who were able to help direct us back to the Lord when we experienced these wounds. And so, these wounds over time have been allowed to fester and to

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grow and to do all sorts of things. And we're going to talk about this because these are the places really where the dryness and where it becomes difficult for us to persevere. So, what are the sources of dryness and how do we respond to them? And we're going to go through a list of them.

Sin

So, the very first place that dryness is created is through sin. Saint Ignatius of Loyola, he'll remind us for those who are making a nation retreat, who are trying to live the spiritual life that those who are experiencing dryness in prayer experience that for one of three reasons. One, it's because of sin. Two, it's because there's something that we ourselves are not relating to the Lord that he wants us to relate to him that we're withholding from him or three, it's because the Lord is inviting us to really seek the giver and not the gift itself. To seek the one who is and was and is to come and not the gifts that the one has for us.

Well, when it comes to sin, there are times when some of us persist in mortal sin, or we persist in a venial sin, but in such a way that it creates an obstacle to our relationship with the Lord and these sins, these sins dry up or close off our hearts to receiving from God His grace, to receiving from God His intimacy, His love and his presence. Now God is gentle. God is gentle and loving. God's gentle and loving presence in our lives, He wants to pour out on us grace. But if we're living in these places of sin, it cuts off his ability because we have turned our hearts away from him and the Lord keeps ministering, and he keeps calling and he keeps inviting. But the first really place that oftentimes dryness arises is through sin and so we want to seek the Lord in the sacrament of reconciliation regularly, bringing to him our venial, as well as our mortal sins, bringing to him anything that could separate us from the love of God.

The second thing though is to remember that we can't change ourselves of our own power, that we need the Lord, that we need the mercy that Jesus Christ shares and offers to us from the cross. We need the intercession of our blessed mother, that through them both, that through them both, our Lord is going to meet us in these places of sinfulness to break us free. And it's important that our prayer recognizes this powerlessness, that our prayer recognizes our total dependence on God.

Pride

A second place from which dryness comes is pride. Now when we experience wounds, and this is really important. And when we experience wounds and these are not shared with God, these are unrelated to the Lord, there is often a subtle movement within the heart where like Adam and Eve, we think that the Lord is not trustworthy, so we choose to trust in ourselves over God. We choose to turn to ourselves because the Lord allowed this to happen in my life. Therefore, He must not be trustworthy. Therefore, He must not love me, or He must not be good. These are the whispers of Satan. The reality is that that these things happen in our lives.

The Lord has experienced them and has taken them to Himself to heal us, to restore us and to renew us. He's inviting us to go with Him there and to bring Him there and to share these experiences with Him, but our pride, what our pride does is our pride says no, no, you're not

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welcome here because you allow this to happen in my life. Well, the Lord, yes. In the strictest sense, yes, he does allow it because he is God. But the reality is that he gave each one of us free will, He gave each one of us freedom. And in the Lord's gift of freedom and the Lord's gift of our will, He has to recognize that for all people. And oftentimes it's the sins of others against us that have caused these wounds and the Lord desires to meet us in these places of woundedness. He desires to manifest himself there, to make love known there.

Now our pride will rear its head in three ways principally. There's many more, but there's three ways from the places of wound. The first is self-reliance. Because I've accepted this lie that God is not trustworthy, I need to take care of myself. I need to fix this or do that. I need to make the plan. And there isn't room for God to actually take care of me. It's almost like once I notice a fear or a lie or a place of suffering in my heart, I begin to make plans for how to address it rather than simply rest in his love for me to allow Him to heal me, or I don't even share with Him that I'm struggling.

So, our response, once we recognize this is to present this is present is simply to acknowledge it and ask the Lord to help us and to surrender to him, to allow Him to be in control, to rely on Him. As this happens, much like when we share with Him our fears or our sufferings, there are further invitations to surrender and a deeper sharing in His passion, a deeper sharing in His love, a deeper sharing in His intimacy.

The second way that pride is manifesting our woundedness, it comes from self-justification. Another way that this is. And that means basically that I've taken responsibility for everything in my life. In every aspect, grades, work, my success, my children's choices or actions, there's perfectionism or co-dependency. Rather than allowing the Lord to be responsible, I'm the one responsible so I have to justify every behavior, every action. I have to justify why this is the way that this is. And this is exhausting. I know this is a place that I struggled in my own life, the self-justification, where I'm always thinking, well what does this person need? How do I answer their objection to this without ever really giving them the chance or the space to have this conversation with me?

Again, in this place of self-justification, we're asked to turn to the Lord to look at Jesus on the cross. He doesn't justify himself, he doesn't justify his behavior, he simply offers all back to the Father and we're asked to come to him and to acknowledge that we are struggling here, that we cannot change our patterns of living without his help and that we were invited by him to ask for more assistance. This pride that comes in self justification is insidious and it gets underneath so many of the ways that we try to live our lives and protect ourselves.

Self- Contempt

A third way that pride makes itself known is through self-contempt. So, self-contempt is that sense of my own anger or hatred about me. It's the sense of if God really saw me as I see me. He'd think about me like I think about me, which is filled with self-contempt. If God really saw me, He would see that I'm a loser, that I'm all the self-hatred, the shame, the judgment, the condemnation, that there's nothing good about me. Like He'd see all this. And then if He saw all this, He would discard me, like in many ways we treat ourselves. And it comes out in many

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different ways, oftentimes in self-deprecating humor, oftentimes it comes out either seeing ourselves above other people or actually seeing ourselves below other people, but self-contempt is a real area of pain in the heart and it creates so much shame. It creates so much guilt, not the guilt that leads to conversion, but the guilt that keeps us turning inwards towards the self. And so what does the Lord ask of us here? How does the Lord ask?

So, what does the Lord ask, he asks us to come before him and to say to him, Lord, how do you see me? Or how do you experience me? And this is a really, really powerful question. And if we hear anything that is accusative, if we hear anything that is judgmental or shaming, if we hear anything that is not rooted in the gentle love of God. Now that doesn't mean he's not firm and it doesn't mean he's not direct and it doesn't mean that he is open to sin. He's not any of those things. He's not open to sin at all, but he is gentle, and he is firm, and he is direct and he will speak to your heart as he speaks to mine and that's why we stay rooted in scripture. That's why we stay rooted in Lexio because it keeps us in his word, it keeps us in this relationship, in this dialogue and in this embrace. And it continues to help us to be aware and to make known what's there.

So, our Lord in Isaiah 43, He reminds us that He sees us as precious in His eyes, honored and loved. That He who created, formed and redeemed us and calls us by name invites us to draw close to the sacred heart of Jesus and the immaculate heart of Mary to know the truth about who you and I are, to remove this root, to remove this weed of pride and of self-contempt.

Unforgiveness

Another reason that times that we experienced dryness in our lives and in our prayer is unforgiveness. Now, the reason that unforgiveness can do this is because unforgiveness causes the heart to harden. There's a hardening of the heart that takes place with unforgiveness that can make it very challenging for each of us to experience the love of God in our lives. In fact, Saint Paul says to us in his letter to the Ephesians, forgive one another even as God in Christ has forgiven you. We truly experience the mercy of God; we cannot truly experience the mercy of God if we do not show it to one another.

Further, often one of the greatest obstacles that causes this dryness is unforgiveness of self. So due to my pride, it can be really hard for me to receive God's mercy. And this is really important, really important. When it comes to forgiveness to invite the Lord to meet us here in the experience of when it happened, to meet us in the experience of the wound, just like we do with our fears. We ask the Lord to meet us in this place and to share with him vulnerably from our hearts what we experienced, what was going on.

And by that, I mean, what did the three or the five or the seven year old me experience when this wound happened? What did the three or five or seven year old me know about when this happened? I remember being a small child and it was and taking responsibility. Like I had this belief that the reason my parents wanted to have more kids was because I wasn't good enough as their son. And so, they wanted more kids in a sense to replace me. Talk about crazy, but it made it really hard for me to sit with the Lord because I didn't believe that I was worthy of God's time.

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I didn't believe that the Lord really wanted me. Like I saw all these other priests as people who were there to replace me because I wasn't worthy of His love.

And so, as I'm sitting there with the Lord and what comes out is just the way that I perceive something that happened as a small boy. And I went back to Jesus and the Father. Oh, the Father was so good. He took me in His lap and we went outside and He just shared with me like how I was His delight and the reason my parents had more children was because of how much they delighted in me and how much joy I brought them. But I had to forgive myself for believing that I wasn't wanted, that I wasn't in this place of that I was replaceable. And it took a tremendous amount of trust and time sitting with the Lord to allow that to happen. Because I believed, I really believed that I was replaceable.

And so, when I found myself here, I would ask Jesus to help me forgive myself. I went to confession, and I confessed self-hatred and self-contempt and I confessed unforgiveness of self and self-blame and this and the priest just said, well now can you accept God's mercy and I looked at him. I said I don't know how because I live so much of my life thinking that I wasn't deserving of it, that I should be replaced, that I wasn't enough. And the priest just shared with me. He said, well, try this. I want you to say in the name of Jesus Christ, help me to receive the mercy you have offered me in confession.

In forgiving myself for believing that I wasn't worthy, that I was replaceable. And as I sat with the Lord there, I just could feel the tears come and even now, as I'm sharing this with you, just that sense of like no, like the Lord really loves me and I'm not replaceable. I'm His son and I'm meant to be here with Him. I'm meant to be here, and we have to ask the Lord to help us to forgive. We can't forgive on our own. Forgiveness comes from the cross. It doesn't come because I will. It comes because Jesus Christ on the cross says Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. And so, the Father invites us to share with Him, to call on Jesus' name, in the name of Jesus, help me to forgive, help me want to forgive. Jesus helped me want to want to forgive, so and so. And then to share with Jesus, all the pain, the sorrow, the suffering they caused in my life.

Anger

A couple more, anger. So, these wounds that we experience, the suffering that we experience in our lives that causes our fears or our sorrows can create anger within the heart. Because we are looking for someone to blame to help us understand and control what is going on so that it doesn't happen again. Often though, these wounds and those who wounded us are completely outside of our control. So, this anger gets turned towards God and towards ourselves. It is all my fault. And this has happened.

And so, what we were being asked by the Lord is to simply share with Him as Job does. I want to encourage you to read chapter three of Job. Job goes to the Lord. Job tells the Father everything that's going on, Job tells Him freely about it all. And the Father meets Job there. And the Father says to his friends, look at how well Job has spoken up and Job just was sharing with the Father all of his anger, all of his frustrations, all of everything that was out of his control, his grief and his pain, but in doing so, it gave space for the Father to meet Job. It gave space for the

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Father to care for Job's heart, to give Job the freedom to go and to live his life. Blessed be God that Job was so bold. And we have this in the Psalms, read Psalm 13. So powerful, especially when we're experiencing this dryness and this loneliness.

Expectations

Two other one, one other one really, well two. There's more, but we'll go with these two, expectations. Sometimes the reason we experienced dryness or the struggle to be faithful in prayer is because we have expectations that we haven't shared with God. You and I say our prayer should look this way. We should experience this in prayer. And then when it doesn't happen, we get frustrated or we get angry and God is like, well, tell me about that. And then the Lord oftentimes says, well, where does that come from? The antidote to expectations is to naming them, acknowledging them, placing them before the Lord so the Lord can speak truth in our hearts. The Lord can make it known and the Lord can heal.

Fidelity

And the last one here is fidelity. I think sometimes the reason we have the greatest difficulty or struggle is because we're just not faithful to what we've promised God. We're not faithful to the time of prayer. And this is a huge reason that we experienced so much dryness is because we're not fidelity. The Lord is asking us to grow in fidelity. And this is actually really exciting because it means that he is purifying our hearts as we grow in our fidelity and he's expanding them as he seeks to fill us.

A Grace to Ask the Holy Spirit

So just really quick, persevering is a grace that we have to ask of the Holy Spirit. It is a gift given to us by God to take one step at a time, to grow in vulnerability, to grow in trust and to make known our hearts. When we run into dryness, dryness is not meant to be the ordinary way of our lives. There are the exceptions of the spiritual purifications that take place of the dark night of the soul and of the census, but most of the time dryness is because there's a place we're not willing to share with the Lord something that's coming up in our hearts that we think is insignificant, but really is important. It also comes again from sin, or it comes from our own lack of fidelity or our expectations.

So, I just want to encourage you to not blame yourself when dryness comes up, but to ask Lord to reveal what is hidden from view and to reveal ourselves to the Lord so that He Himself may meet us in this dryness. Ultimately, perseverance is remaining with Jesus. It's remaining with the Father and with the Holy Spirit and with Mary. It is a real sense of drawing close to the Lord and allowing him to draw close to us. Ultimately, perseverance is remaining with Jesus, with the Father and with the Holy Spirit and with Mary. It is a real sense of drawing close to the Lord and allowing Him to draw close to us, to experience His tender and gentle gaze and love and to allow that love to reveal and purify our fears. The lies that undergird them and ultimately to place love and companionship or isolation, loneliness and abandonment were in our wounds. It is to know that as we go to Jesus to console Him in the garden, He has already come to our hearts to console us in our suffering and pain.

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Dryness in the end is simply a means of journeying as it is a means on the journey of helping us to discover as we faithfully return to the Lord day after day, allowing Him to care for us and tend to our wounded and suffering hearts areas for further transformation and healing.

In the end of life of prayer, rooted in the word of God will bring to light those places of fear and suffering and allow us to turn to Him and find solace and consolation in His love, in His loving embrace, both in our baptism where He calls us His children and from the cross where He took to Himself all of our suffering.

We are only asked as He asked His disciples to accompany Him, to take up our crosses and follow Him because in following Him, we find that we are sons and daughters of the most high. We find our freedom to love and to be loved.

Closing Prayer

I pray that this was a blessed time for you, and that these words will help you to come to know and be more aware of the areas that the Lord desires to work and move in your heart and that may every grace and every blessing be with you and be assured of my constant and continuous prayers for you. May the blessing of almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit come upon you and remain with you forever, Amen.