

From the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to St. John, at chapter 19, verse 28:

“After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), ‘I am thirsty.’”

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

How significant is it that John’s gospel of our Lord records these three words for all time?

“I am thirsty”

The living God helps us to encounter Him by use of our imagination...one of God’s gifts to us. In using our imagination this afternoon, we can see Jesus in his final agony. Even before being nailed to that cross, His physical body was tortured beyond endurance. And now...on the cross...now, it is even worse.

The weight of his whole body is held up there only by nails through his flesh...like a picture on a wall. Those nails pushing against bare nerves in hands and feet...screaming, unendurable pain. Hour after hour, he transfers that absolutely mind-numbing pain back and forth...pushing against his feet to get some relief at his hands. Until he cannot stand it anymore, and back to hanging by his hands. Back and forth. Back and forth. Right to the end.

And yet, the gospel does not record any words from him about **that** agony.

Instead, across the ages, we hear, “I am thirsty”.

Think about that for a few moments.

In using our imagination again, we see Jesus as a relatively and physically fit young man who walked throughout the Holy Land for years. Almost all of our known artistic images of him show someone who is lean, with a slender build.

We do not know him as someone bulked up..as a modern day professional athlete accused of abusing metabolic steroids. Rather, we imagine a man of softness in touch, of graceful movements, but with lean sinews or muscles of strength and stamina....rather like a marathon runner. Marathon runners seem to have a way of putting the pain out of mind. Heart pounding. Joints aching. Leg muscles numb, except for the continuing shock of bleeding, blistering feet against hard road. Somehow able to go on, mile after mile, in some zombie-like state...kind of like being on automatic pilot.

But, with today’s science of modern sports medicine, we now know something about the keen, gentle fragility of maintaining that highest efficiency of a world-class athletic performance:

The secret is in Adequate hydration. Keeping fluids in one’s system.

In the name of replacing nutrients, fluids, and electrolytes due to perspiration, the sports drink industry has made a financial fortune...first with the athletic community, and now with good ol' Joe Blows like me doing yard work on hot, summer days. So, in the light of modern-day, Madison Avenue advertising, it would be easy for me to say Jesus was simply asking for the equivalent of Gatorade, thank you, and now I will sit down. But, there is more to "I am thirsty". Far more.

No, this is not a commercial. A quick sound bite.

Author, the Rev. Peter J. Gomes draws a dual relationship from the utterance of Jesus of these words. On the one hand, when Jesus says, "I thirst" we are reminded that he is deprived of the dignity of human kindness at the apex of his physical suffering. Deprived of the humanity that has been taken from him by degrees and, by implication, what is taken from him is also taken from us. We also are deprived and dehumanized by even our historical participation in this spectacle, as one cannot watch violence and not become violated and a part of the violence. And, on the other hand, just as we struggle with the very real physical and material nature of it all...the gasping for water, and the further insult of offering sour vinegar...we are reminded that to thirst, biblically, is to yearn. To long for. To seek after that which truly satisfies that which we both truly need and we truly lack.

We remember some fifteen chapters earlier in John's gospel that Jesus, while walking through Samaria, was tired from the journey and stopped by a water well. During his conversation with the woman at that well, she...and we..learned about "**living water**", water that would quench her thirst **forever**.

Many of us now read or hear that story with a twinkle in our eyes, as if we were "in on the joke" as it were. That woman took him literally with the word "water" and probably wondered what was alive about it...rather like the casks of algae-filled water lying for months on board the old sailing ships. But Jesus was talking then at the well...and now on the cross...of the "thirst" of the soul for God; and they often spoke of quenching this thirst with "living water." Here on the cross, again, Jesus audibly shares his need for replenishment, for refreshment. Not for his dying body being racked by searing, unending pain. But for his soul. His spirit. His connection of love with God the father.

We focus today on the act of his broken body on that cross, heaving and convulsing to its end, pushing and pulling upon metal spikes driven against bare nerves. But it is also appropriate...in fact necessary...to connect that most horrible vision of our faith with one of the most beautiful, one of the most lyrical and poetic prayers within our liturgy. The connection between hearing "I am thirsty" from separation and searching for refreshment by and with God, to that of being led to "living water" through the sacrament of baptism, and the offer of prayer of thanksgiving over the water:

“We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water. Over it, the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation. Through it, you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise. In it, your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us, through his death and resurrection, from the bondage of sin into everlasting life.

“We thank you, Father, for the water of Baptism. In it, we are buried with Christ in his death. By it, we share in his resurrection. Through it, we are reborn by the Holy Spirit. Therefore in joyful obedience to your Son, we bring into his fellowship those who come to him in faith, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

We thirst after God because there is a thirst for God, a desire for God placed within us by God which only God can satisfy. Nothing and nobody else will do. Money, sex, even love...they are all nice to have, but they will not do because our soul is athirst for God. St. Augustine prayed, “Thou hast made us for thyself and our hearts are restless...meaning thirsty....until they find their rest in thee...meaning thirst quenched.

Thirsting for the goodness of God’s people. Thirsting for the love of God’s people. Thirsting for the desire of God for God’s people. There is the real physical thirst which reminds us that this is not a pageant, and there is also the longing, this sense that Jesus expresses on our behalf, that he too thirsts for the living God.

In that sense, we look forward to the satisfaction, the quenching, the filling of our thirst...not with vinegar on a stick, but rather with the cup of salvation from the One who at one time gave calm to the lakes and seas, but now is dying of a terrible thirst on the cross for the love of his lost sheep.

Amen.