

Good Friday 2021 JN 19:28 "I Thirst."

Our Crucified Lord's fifth word from the cross was only two words, "I thirst." Recall in John Chapter 7, when Jesus went up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. The Feast of Tabernacles commemorated the Israelites' wandering in the wilderness after they had been rescued from Egypt, and in their wanderings they knew what it was to be thirsty. And so, on the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink." Jesus is the Fountain, and now, on the cross, the Fountain thirsts. John's account of the Feast of Tabernacles recalls that great event in salvation history, namely the sojourn through the desert as recorded in the Old Testament.

In the same way, the Passion Accounts are riddled with allusions that double back and forth from Golgotha to the Old Testament. The very words, "I thirst" throws the believer into the Book of Psalms, first to Psalm 22 where it says, "My throat is dried up like baked clay, my tongue cleaves to my jaws." (22:16), and then to Psalm 69 where it says, "Rather they put gall in my food, and in my thirst, they gave me vinegar to drink." (69:22)

What was offered to Our Thirsting Lord was the old peasant wine that the Roman soldiers drank when they were parched, and most of them drank it till they were drunk. Giving that to Jesus to drink was far from a friendly gesture. Remember, the crowds had been railing and jeering. Some thought Eli Eli was a call for Elijah to come and rescue him. In John's account which we just read, the "unroyal we," they offered Him a drink. In Mark's account, "someone," the one who teased Him with a drink says, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down."

So who was this someone and what did he mean by saying that? We do not know for sure.

- ✓ Maybe this someone really did want to help but he was intimidated by the crowd.
- ✓ Maybe he was afraid they would think he was one of Jesus' friends, because he had offered him a drink so he pretended to join in the mockery.
- ✓ Maybe he was part of the hostile crowd who wanted to see whether Elijah would come.

Regardless, this man gave God a drink.

In response to the fifth word from the Cross, "There was a vessel filled with common wine. So they put a sponge soaked in wine on a sprig of hyssop and put it to his mouth." Those

who know better would think this was kind of odd. Hyssop is a small, flimsy, weak plant that would not bear the weight of a sponge soaked with wine. Perhaps it was another way to tease Our Crucified Lord, to put some wine on hyssop that could not possibly reach His mouth. Embarrassed by that, some translations have favored an eleventh century manuscript that suggested the sponge was actually put on the end of a javelin or long pole. That is how it is pictured in some medieval paintings of the Crucifixion.

But for all its awkwardness, let's stay with John's hyssop and see yet another Old Testament reference. In Exodus 12, hyssop was used to mark doorposts of the Israelites with the blood of the paschal lamb so the angel of death would pass over their homes.

The connection is between hyssop and the blood of the lamb. The image of Our Crucified Lord as the Lamb of God is so very prevalent in John.

- ✓ At the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, John the Baptist declares, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."
- ✓ In John 19, Jesus was judged at noon, the very hour when the slaughter of the Passover lambs began in the temple.

- ✓ Jesus' bones were not broken, just as the bones of the paschal lambs were not broken.

It is so very fitting that the new covenant should be sealed by the wine of the hyssop, for the wine is the new covenant in His Blood of the Eucharist. Jesus, the ultimate Passover Lamb, indicated all of this earlier in John Chapter 6 when He said, "Amen, amen I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." (6:53-54)

So yes, mention the hyssop, and all kinds of allusions reel into play:

- ✓ the hyssop,
- ✓ the sprinkling,
- ✓ the lamb,
- ✓ the blood.

On this Friday called Good, it is all coming together.

Yet there is another thirst that Our Crucified Lord beckoned from the Cross . . . a thirst for souls.

Both St. Teresa of Calcutta and St. Faustina heard the cry of Jesus on the Cross: "I thirst." Jesus asked both of them for a drink as well, to help satisfy His thirst for souls.

In his tribute to St. Teresa of Calcutta on the occasion of her death, St. John Paul II described this key to Mother Teresa's mission and inspiration. Our late Holy Father said: "Her mission began every day, before dawn, in the presence of the Eucharist. In the silence of contemplation, Mother Teresa of Calcutta heard the echo of Jesus' cry on the Cross: 'I thirst.' This cry received in the depths of her heart, spurred her to seek out Jesus in the poor, the abandoned, and the dying, on the streets of Calcutta and to all the ends of the earth."

In this regard, Mother Teresa experienced a specific moment of life-changing grace. On the night of September 10, 1946, while riding on a train to a mountain town in India to recover from suspected tuberculosis, she received her "vocation within a vocation," a calling to serve Christ among the poorest of the poor. At various times, she referred to this moment of grace with the words of the dying Jesus, "I thirst," as the thirst of Jesus for souls. Teresa took all the suffering of the "poorest of the poor" and laid it, and left it at the foot of the Cross.

In St. Faustina's life, there is a startling parallel to Mother Teresa's moment of grace. During Holy Week in 1937, Sister Faustina had a vision of the crucified Lord and heard the words

of Jesus, "I thirst." Faustina wrote in her diary, "During Holy Mass, I saw the Lord Jesus nailed upon the Cross amidst great torments. A soft moan issued from His Heart. After some time, He said: I thirst. I thirst for souls. Help Me, My daughter, to save souls. Join your suffering to My Passion and offer them to the heavenly Father for sinners (Diary of St., Faustina, 1032).

None of us are a Mother Teresa or a St. Faustina, yet all of us have a soul to quench the thirst of Our Crucified Lord. Each and every one of us has a soul burdened by something. We all have something, a "this" as I've often described it from the pulpit. And how many of us walk in the Church week after week, give your "this" to Our Crucified Lord, and walk out week after week still carrying your "this?" kind of like the unnamed someone who offered Jesus something to drink, but, no, wait. Or I'll offer it on a piece of hyssop, as if I'm teasing Him, but really, you're teasing yourself.

Today, Good Friday, leave your "this" at the foot of the Cross for good, and quench Our Crucified Lord's thirst for souls. After the Solemn Intercessions we will venerate the Cross. In past years, everyone in the Church is given the opportunity to come to the Cross and venerate or kiss His feet. However, this year, due to COVID, we will spend a few

minutes and venerate from our places. From your place will be your perfect time to take your “this” and place it at the foot of the Cross, which is right where your “this” belongs. How many times have we read in scripture Jesus saying, “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened.” Take your heavy burden, lay it at the foot of the Cross, and leave it there. Lord, as you well know, my “this” is so so much bigger than me, but it’s not bigger than You.

Or, your “this” may be profound gratitude. The Swifts will be celebrating our first wedding as my niece will be married Memorial Day weekend. The venue opened up to accommodate the entire guest list and my sister is so profoundly grateful. My altar boy of 30 years ago, now 41 years old, after two years on dialysis and three years on a waiting list, received a new kidney on St. Patrick’s Day. Profound gratitude my sister and my altar boy will be leaving at the foot of the Cross today.

O Crucified Savior, you thirsted for a drink on the Cross and an unnamed man gave God a drink. Yet, even more, You thirsted with Your whole being for souls and St. Teresa and St. Faustina spent their lives quenching Your thirst. May we quench your thirst as well, by withholding nothing, by

commending to you our souls with all that burdens them, with all that makes them profoundly grateful. May we, like Teresa and Faustina, help to quench your thirst by commending our souls to you, and encouraging others to do the same. Amen.