

The Seven Last Words of Christ
Reflections by Fr. Paul S. Naumann, S.J.
© 2020 Paul S. Naumann, a.r.r.

The FIFTH

“I thirst.”

“After all this, Jesus, knowing that all was now completed, said, ‘I thirst.’”

To begin with, it is the human condition, thirst. But not only the human, it is the condition of all life. No water, no life. Those whizzing cameras and telescopes, orbiters and gadgets out there in the solar system and beyond, homing-in on planets and their moons, what do they hope to find? Evidence of water. No inter-planetary migrations without water. After we finish the oil wars, the ethnic wars, and the power wars, the experts that I read assure me that the next wars will be fought over water.

Thirst makes a universal metaphor for human desires. Herewith, a handful of things we can thirst for: peace, love, security for self-and-family-and-friends, health, fame-and-fortune with its attendant gifts, justice, divine grace, redemption, the knowledge and vision of God, which is our high reward at last. Sometimes a simple response is all we thirst for, all we look for, all we need. An act of kindness or recognition.

Jesus on the cross received no acts of kindness. Yes, his mother stood below, sharing all of her sympathy, her compassion; yes, there was John, and the women who were disciples, but they could not *do* anything to help, assist, or relieve. The confession of the good thief had come and gone early in the three hours of agonizing hanging from the wood and nails. How long could a man in that position recognize himself as *anything* but, as the psalmist says, “a worm, and no man.”

What crowd there was, of soldiers, officials, elders, and the people attracted by any execution, all those spent themselves in mocking Jesus. The most cutting, the most ironic was the taunt, "He saved **OTHERS** but he cannot save himself." No, he cannot save himself, not if we are to be saved, we others who are the objects of Jesus' thirst.

Crucifixion produces a "raging thirst," very real, very physical. How could it be otherwise, considering the loss of blood, and sweat, to say nothing of the toil? You come at this from any angle, and you come face to face with intolerable suffering, barbaric treatment, Cicero calls crucifixion 'the most cruel.' Cruel thirst that finally elicited an act of kindness, depending on which commentator you follow. "There was a bowl of sour wine standing there. So they soaked a sponge in the wine, put it on a spear, and pushed it up toward his mouth."

Some will tell you this was ordinary treatment at a crucifixion; some will tell you this was more mockery; Jesus will tell you that his thirst led to the fulfillment of a verse in Psalm 69, "They put gall in my food, and gave me vinegar for my thirst."

How foolish we are, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."

Deprived of water to drink. How many people throughout the world have to do without fresh, clean water. About one-third. "Each day water-related diseases kill 3,900 of the world's children." The irony here is that the Christ is the source of the waters of salvation. "If you knew . . . who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you

living water. . . . Indeed, the water I give will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Besides his thirst for water, the struggling, dying Jesus has a thirst for each one of us, that we might drink from the spring of eternal life and dwell with him forever. That is why we must examine our own thirsts, so that we can say with the psalmist:

O God, you are my God, for you I long;
for *you* my soul is thirsting.
My body pines for you
like a dry, weary land without water.