

# Fifth Sunday of Lent – “I Thirst” – April 1&2, 2017

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It was a wintry lent that year when I was a junior in high school. My class went on a three day retreat out in the country at a center run by the Jesuits in Monroe, NY. The retreat team chose as their theme that year the Passion of Jesus, so that many of the talks, meditations, and activities revolved around the cross of Jesus. I remember we were shown a film about the work done at Calvary Hospital, a place that cared for end-stage cancer patients. When a person is getting ready to die, their organs begin to shut down, movement slows, appetite diminishes. All of that, that is so important when we're living, is replaced by thirst, a powerful, insatiable thirst that no water drawn through a straw, no ice chips cooling the tongue, no wet cloth on the brow can ever slake. I remember after the film had ended, to a man, each of my classmates lined up at the water cooler to drink deeply as if they had been wandering for weeks in some arid desert.

At the beginning of His last ordeal, before the spikes were pounded into His flesh, Jesus had been offered the drink that all condemned men were offered; wine mixed with the drug myrrh which would dull the pain of the assault that was about to be perpetrated on His body. Because He needed to experience all the pain of our sins that He was taking on, the Man of Sorrows refused even this small alleviation of suffering.

But now, as He hung upon the cross, His breathing shallow and irregular, moving in and out of consciousness, His body wracked with

pain, His soul in an agony of loneliness, Jesus knew the end was near. He summoned the strength to ask a small favor of the soldiers who mocked Him with their scorn and their sneering presence. A drink ... could I have a drink ... I am so dry ... I thirst. One soldier took pity, dipped a sponge in the soldiers' bucket of cheap, sour wine. He stuck the soaked sponge on a branch of hyssop, the same hyssop that the Jews would use to sprinkle their doorposts with the lamb's blood at Passover in a few hours, and held it up to the dying man on the cross. The psalmist had foretold of the Messiah, "They put gall in my food and in my thirst, they gave me vinegar to drink."

As Jesus tasted the sour wine, He knew that death was very near, and like all men, His body was on fire with thirst. But, that physical thirst of the last hours was not the only thirst the Messiah felt. Far greater was His thirst for us, that we would, at last, turn from our selfish, unbelieving ways, and return as prodigals to the loving embrace of the Father.

The ancient, spurned prophet Jeremiah lamented over Jerusalem which had forsaken her God and killed the prophets: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, turn back to your God!"

We are the souls for whom Jesus thirsts. We are the slaves of sin whose freedom He bought on that bloody cross. We are the ones dying without knowing it, of thirst for the Living God. We are Jerusalem!

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, turn back to your God!"