

Sermon Good Friday 2021

In Calcutta, the sisters of Mother Theresa, the Missionaries of Charity, continue their founder's work with a house for the dying. The sisters walk through the streets, and amongst the poor and the homeless dying in lanes and gutters and under bridges, take them to this modest house so they may leave this life with some comfort and dignity. In their chapel beside the crucifix are placed the words, 'I thirst.' The sisters in Fitzroy, ministering amongst the alcoholic men of Melbourne, in their chapel, the words: 'I thirst.' Indeed, Mother Teresa ordered that Jesus' words "I thirst!" should appear next to the cross in *all* her communities around the world.

As the last breaths of the Incarnate Word of God are being drawn, the most basic, human, primal cry is heard: *I thirst*. We say so many complex things about Jesus. We can get so caught up in so many complex ways of trying to understand him. But the mystery of the cross cuts through so much of that. Those searing words, *I thirst* shows us (if nothing else) how the holy one upon the cross is supremely, utterly, vulnerably, painfully, (but also wonderfully) *human*. Does it say all there is to be said? No. Christian faith can never take one aspect of Christ's life in isolation and imagine that is enough, whether that be his Incarnation, his teaching, his miracles, his example, or even his death. And all these only ever rightly understood in the light of the Resurrection. But the simplicity and poignancy of something like, *I thirst* remains an important, crucial anchor. Who is that we look upon the Cross? Yes, the Eternal Word of God. But also, the poor man of Galilee.

The Evangelist John tells us that Jesus' cry of thirst is on order to *complete the scriptures*. In response to which Jesus is offered sour wine, probably a kind of vinegar, which was considered refreshing. This simple gesture, however, has rich Old Testament resonances and why the seemingly insignificant detail was remembered. 'I thirst' surely looks to the so-called 'Passion Psalm' 69 in which the just victim laments, *for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink*. One of the earliest and most widespread gospel traditions is Jesus' cry of dereliction while quoting psalm 22. *My God, my God why have you forsaken me*.

In this psalm we also find the reference, *dried up like baked clay is my throat, my tongue cleaves to my jaws*'. Jesus' cry, then, fulfilling what is envisaged by the psalmist. But we might also find echoes from Isaiah 5 in the Song of the Vineyard. There, God brings *his* lament to Israel. He had planted a vineyard in a prime place and taken every care over it. *He looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes*. It is the sour grapes of human sin which is exactly the cup Our Lord takes to drink on his Cross. At the beginning of the Passion Narrative as told by John, Jesus rebukes Peter for drawing his sword against the arresting party. *The cup the Father has given me, am I not to drink?* Jesus' cry, *I thirst*, shows his same determination to drink the cup.

In Christ's words, *'I thirst'*, perhaps we can also hear echoes in the depths of our own heart. His thirst echoes our own. We all have our own needs, our fragilities, our vulnerabilities, our limitations. Some are more aware than others. But we all know that life is not always as it should be. We all feel, we all know - each one of us - that there are deep longings, deep yearnings, *a deep thirst* which so often remains unsatisfied, unquenched.

In our age there are no shortage of options to how we might satisfy that thirst. Christ is offered vinegary wine perhaps to deaden the pain, but *he* takes it so *to complete the Scriptures*. Others, though, indeed seek ways to *escape* life, to deaden the experience of life. Alcohol, drugs, anonymous sex, and any manner of addictions all take their heavy and exacting toll. But so many others - under a veneer of civility and respectability - seek to satisfy their thirst with the noise and distraction of TV, social media, and video games, or with any number of gadgets under the illusion that technology will some how save us. Still others look to work, to busyness and frenetic activity to block out the chilling reminder of the emptiness within. Some hope that political activism will save them and us. Even within the church, we sometimes become expert at finding any means other than The Means of quenching our thirst. We think this programme, or that activity, or some book, or another course will do the trick. Sometimes we imagine if only we had more young people, if only the music were better, if only the preaching was better. If only there were more people to help out, if only, if only... We become expert at ignoring to true Cup of Life.

For Jesus, drinking the cup the Father had given, and taking of the sour wine, is the sign that, *it is finished*. Having fulfilled his resolve, his work is *accomplished*. We hear, then, that after Christ breathes his last and gives up his spirit, a soldier with his spear pierces the side of Christ. In the sublime Mystery of the Gospel, the one who cried *I thirst* now becomes a fountain of flowing blood and water! The pierced side becomes the source of salvation and of the life-giving sacraments. Just as Eve takes her life from the side of Adam, so from we take our life from the side of the Second Adam. The door in the ark has been opened and out flows the waters of life and divine love. As Christians we must never tire of coming to this well-spring! Because Christ *is* the One who alone will satisfy our thirsty hearts. *Christ alone*. Everything else will only ever leave us wanting for more. From his pieced heart, his broken heart, he can satisfy our thirst. *From within him shall flow rivers of living water*.

My friends, it is one thing to recognise our own thirst, and seek ways to quench it. It is quite another to step beyond our own thirst and recognise the thirst of others in our world today. The human instinct is to avoid pain, to run away from suffering, to put away and silence the cries of anguish in our own lives *and* in the lives of those around us. But the Christian instinct must be, as Christ did, to confront these challenges *head on*.

The cross is challenging, it confronts us. And from it, my brothers and sisters, Christ speaks to us today. *I thirst*. Can you hear him? We repeatedly respond to God's abundant love with vinegar, a sour heart that is unable to see or accept God's love. But, *I thirst*: this cry of Jesus is addressed to every single one of us. Will we allow these words to well up within ourselves? Might we say, *Yes Lord, I thirst*. In a few moments, as we approach and gather before the Cross today, let us put aside all the illusions and delusions that prevent us from drinking deep of its mystery. Let us put aside all those defences that seek to silence or ignore our deepest thirst. Let us unstop the ears of our hearts so we can hear the cries of those around us in need. From his open heart, let us accept from Christ his gift of water and blood. And let us pray that *all* the world may drink deep at the wells of salvation. Amen.