

Lent 2023, Week 3 Reflection

THIRST AND THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Welcome to the Third Week of the Lenten audio retreat, presented by Ignatian Young Adult Ministries, an initiative of the Office of Ignatian Spirituality. Last week we explored the theme of “Openness, Listening, and Responding to God’s Call.” We turn our attention now to “Thirst & the Presence of God.” So take a moment before we begin to check in with yourself. What do you need right now to help you enter more fully into prayer? A snack, a beverage, a blanket, a breath? Simply attend to your physical needs before we begin... This week’s reflection was written by Andria Seneviratne, a member of the 2018 - 2020 Contemplative Leaders in Action program Washington, D.C. cohort and current D.C. regional coordinator.

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The third week of Lent begins with an invitation to accept the living water of Christ. The Gospel acclamation reads, “Lord, you are truly the Savior of the world; give me living water, that I may never thirst again.”

What does it feel like to thirst? Take a moment to think about it - to feel it in your body...

Perhaps your mouth and lips become dry, or your throat may feel like it’s closing up.

Oftentimes, when my mind is busy and I have a lot to do, I’ll forget to drink water. And it’s not until I feel pretty dehydrated that I remember to drink water. At this point, I have a headache, I’m tired, and I’m cold. I’ve noticed lately that in moments of mindlessness I’ll eat instead of drinking water because I haven’t taken the time to really think about why I feel light-headed or tired.



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Our spiritual thirst may be masked in the same way. We may know that something is “off” or doesn’t quite feel right and we may be masking that thirst with things that distract us. Those nice dopamine hits that keep us satiated for just a moment longer - long enough for us to put off discerning what our true “thirst” is about. Scrolling Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest, ESPN, etc. provides these beautiful hits that keep us wanting more and somehow feeling less by the end. Maybe the most interesting part of this experience is that by the time we’re done scrolling, the algorithm knows more about us than we know about ourselves. If you’ve developed an immunity to social media, perhaps take a moment to consider what other numbing mechanisms you’ve incorporated into your life...

Discerning spiritual thirst in the first place feels like a holy endeavor in and of itself. It requires us to pause and feel.

How terrifying.

And, yet, it feels like a necessary part of the human condition to feel despair and anguish so that we can hope for and invite God into a life of joy and peace. The emptiness that we feel at the pit of our stomach, the ache in our heart, the clenching of our fists- these spiritual signs of thirst that our incarnational faith invites us to feel - are ultimately the first step to seeking God.

The funny thing is that we don't have to go very far to find God. In this week's first reading, God tells Moses to strike the staff on the rock so that the people will believe that God is in their midst. Yet, God is right there standing in front of Moses on the rock in Horeb. The Israelites are testing God to physically prove his presence while he is standing right in front of them! How much more powerful would it have been if the people lamented directly to God and stood there vulnerably in front of him and declared their **need** for his love and presence?

In the Gospel reading, the Samaritan woman shares her desire for living water and her hope for the arrival of the Messiah. How courageous of the woman to so openly share her hopes, her *thirst*. Jesus replies to her as he replies to us, "I am he, the one speaking with you."

This Lenten season, we are invited to be aware of and to share our own thirst with the Lord. Let us pray for the courage to feel our spiritual thirst and for the vulnerability to ask for a deeper relationship with God, "Lord, you are truly the Savior of the world; give me living water, that I may never thirst again."

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Thanks for taking the time to sit with your "Thirst" in the "presence of God." From everyone at Ignatian Young Adult Ministries and the Office of Ignatian Spirituality, blessings as you continue your Lenten journey! Tune in next week when we'll "Upend Expectations" and "Look into the Heart"...

Reflection questions:

- *What does spiritual thirst feel like in my body, and what emotions are associated with my spiritual thirst?*
 - *In what ways may I be numbing my need for connection with God and his creation?*
 - *What is the next small step I can take to invite God into my thirst?*
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Opening & Closing Prayers

Uncrowd My Heart by Esther de Waal

Uncrowd my heart, O God,
until silence speaks
in your still, small voice.
Turn me from the hearing of words,
and the making of words,
and the confusion of much speaking,
to listening,
waiting
stillness,
silence.

-From Lost in Wonder: Recovering the Spiritual Art of Attentiveness

In the Hands of God by Pedro Arrupe

More than ever I find myself in the hands of God.
This is what I have wanted all my life from my youth.
But now there is a difference;
the initiative is entirely with God.
It is indeed a profound spiritual experience
to know and feel myself so totally in God's hands.