



# Apostles for Today

Reflection and Prayer - April 2008

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## Fundamental Rule 29

Thirst for the glory of God and the salvation of souls

St. Vincent Pallotti wrote:

*Our Lord Jesus Christ while in his agony said "I thirst" (Jn. 19,28), with this phrase he wished to express not only natural (physical) thirst, but more his mystical thirst for the glory of the Father and the salvation of souls. Therefore, for love of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are to make use of all the spiritual means at our disposal in order that our thirst for the greater glory of God and for the well-being of souls, be alive and growing in us each day until death. This perfect and growing thirst should be one of the distinctive characteristics of all members of the Union. (OCC III, page 57-58)*

## Reflection

When the executioners heard Jesus say "I thirst", they thought he was asking for vinegar to relieve his pain. Jesus accepted this humane gesture of pity when they held up a damp sponge for him, but he merely moistened his lips and refused to drink. With this gesture he wanted to acknowledge human mercy but, at the same time, show that the real thirst of the heart cannot be satisfied simply with worldly means.

The "I thirst" that Jesus uttered acquires paramount significance once we realise the circumstances. Jesus is about to die, he is fully aware of his condition. On the one hand, he is in agony and every single word has to break through the barrier of excruciating pain and deadly exhaustion. On the other hand, his death is the crowning of his mission and so he wants to give us his final teaching and for the last time recap and convey the very essence of it. This shows us that suffering and dying cannot be an excuse to dispense us from thinking about the most important things, but rather they can be an opportunity to see them in perfect freedom and truth and cleanse us of our disorderly desires. Jesus

wants to tell us that his thirst was the driving force of his life, the original cause for the incarnation and the reason that led him to the cross. In a spiritual sense, Jesus is dying of thirst. But what exactly does he thirst for? In its essence, this thirst is love.

Firstly, Jesus wants to show how much God cares for people, if he decides to die for us. "For love is strong as death" says the Song of Songs (Song 8,6). Every person who has truly loved knows that real love is inseparable from suffering, as it requires one to be open to another person and thus also open to rejection or longing. In another book of the Old Testament God says "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice" (Hos. 6,6), emphasising that it is only the voluntary and selfless love of man, rather than his religious practices, that satisfy the thirst felt by God. In fact the whole history of creation and salvation is one great "I thirst" addressed to man by God, a desire for reciprocation. God desires the salvation of every sinner and he especially wants to be with this sinner at the moment of death.

Secondly, Jesus voices his thirst also as a human person. Everyone knows how many needs we have to satisfy so as to survive and achieve at least a minimum of happiness. Undoubtedly, Jesus can feel all those desires of all persons in all times, their insatiable needs, fractured dreams, their inability to be fully satisfied, their thirst for food, safety, health, intimacy and happiness. Jesus know, however, what the deepest thirst of each human being is and wants to be the model of how this thirst may be satisfied, to be the model of a perfect human. The deepest desire of the person is to be united with God, which can be achieved by fulfilling his will. Jesus encourages us to distinguish the hundreds of desires that we experience: desires for useful things, of comfort and pleasure, from the one and only real thirst we feel.

A good illustration of two different responses to this teaching of Jesus are the desires demonstrated by his two fellow convicts. The first one only wants to save his life, to escape death, while the other opens himself to his deepest thirst of being united with God in heaven.

Through his death Jesus provides an example of the deepest union with his Father. By crying out "I thirst", he wants to show that his sacrifice was not a sentence imposed on him from the outside, but rather his personal choice taken so that all things could be fulfilled.

An author writing about Pallotti's life<sup>1</sup> observed that our patron comes to embrace this posture of Jesus as his own: "This union with God's will that Pallotti now strives to achieve exceeds any previously practised posture of obedience. He no longer resolves questions by his own choice or his own judgement, neither is it mere waiting for or conceding to the course of events; not at all, instead we can see a soul that is thirsty for love and consciously pursues its purpose. It no longer says "Fiat – let it be" but instead cries out "Sitio – I thirst!".

In our lives, prayer is a practical means to explore the depths of God's thirst. Pallotti says: "If you want to please Jesus, you must entreat him at all times to grant you his precious 'I thirst!' – the thirst for the salvation of souls."

*In a moment of prayer reflect on your deepest thirsts. Consider if and how those desires converge with God's will for you. Pray God to cleanse and give order to your desires and aspirations so that you may become a true witness of Christ and follower of Pallotti.*

### **Excerpt from a book by Father Marie-Dominique Phillippe, OP<sup>2</sup>**

This cry of thirst (...) is also for Mary and for John and for us. This cry should be considered in conjunction with a different proclamation: "On the last day and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, 'If any man thirsts, let him come to me! Let the man come and drink who believes in me. As scripture says, 'Out of his breast shall flow rivers of living water.'" He was speaking about the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given" (Jn. 7,37-39).

This thirsty cry was uttered by the crucified Christ in order to incite in us an ever greater thirst for Jesus and his love. As always, Jesus is present to awaken us, to "concretize and actualize" in us something which in him is complete and eternally fulfilled, but in us has still to be realised. This is the final teaching of Christ to Mary, to John and to us. That is the reason why John communicates it to us. John lived on this thirsty cry; each of us embraces this cry, in proportion to the value of

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Peter Walkenbach SAC, *Der unendliche Gott und das «Nichts und Sünde»*, Lahn-Verlag, Limburg 1953

<sup>2</sup> "J'ai soif". *Entretiens sur la sagesse de la Croix*. Éditions Saint Paul, Versailles, 1996

our love, by practicing our faith. This is the most beautiful thing. This is a call addressed to each of us by one who begs for love, an exceptional call incarnated in the Crucified Body. The fact that this cry is lived by the whole body of Christ makes it “authentic”, as we would say today. This is the final call of Jesus to human kind.

### **Biblical Texts for Further Reflection**

The thirst of Jesus is also discussed in another important text of the Gospel in which Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at a well (Jn. 4,1-26). He asks the woman to give him a drink and then tells her that real satisfaction may only be found in God, saying: “Whoever drinks the water that I shall give will never be thirsty again; the water that I shall give will turn into a spring inside him, welling up to eternal life.” (Jn. 4,14).

A burning thirst for God is also expressed in a psalm: “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I go to see the face of God?” (Ps. 42,2-3)

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, when dying on the cross, you fully experienced all the most burning and deepest human thirsts. Blood and water flowed from your pierced side and became a spring of fresh water quenching all the deepest human needs. Through your death and resurrection we pray:

- for all people suffering from hunger and thirst
- for all those yearning for the Good News, as man does not live by bread alone
- for all those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, that they be satisfied
- for all married couples who are open to the gift of life but whose godly desire to have a baby cannot be satisfied
- for all those living in de facto unions who cannot satisfy their yearning to be close to you through sacramental life
- for all the dying, that in the final moments of this earthly life they may clearly understand that man’s deepest desire is the thirst of God