

Living Water

Deep Calls to Deep · Praying the Scriptures with St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila

What We Found

At Jacob's well the order of thirst is the Gospel in miniature: Jesus asks first ("Give me a drink," John 4:7), because "God thirsts that we may thirst for him" (CCC 2560). Prayer is the encounter of his thirst with ours, and it ends with the woman leaving her water jar behind (4:28): she came to haul and went home announcing. If St. Teresa's rain comes to mind, the analogy is ours, and it fits.

The water has a history: it broke from the struck rock in the desert (Exodus 17:6; "the Rock was Christ," 1 Corinthians 10:4), the prophets promised it as the poured-out Spirit (Isaiah 44:3), Ezekiel saw it deepen from ankles to swimming depth (47:1-5), and Jesus cried the fulfillment at the feast: "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink" (John 7:37), which John glosses plainly: "this he said about the Spirit" (7:39).

St. Teresa maps one gift arriving in increasing fullness: the soul is a garden watered four ways, by hauled buckets, by water wheel, by a running stream, by rain, moving always from our labor toward God's fuller gift, with grace enabling every stage. No caste system: God cherishes the haulers, no method produces the rain, and the gardener's work is faithful presence, consent, and the ordinary tending of virtue. And St. John of the Cross, from a prison cell: the spring flows and runs, although it is night.

Voices of the Church

ST. TERESA OF AVILA

Teresa compares the soul to a garden the Lord delights to walk in, and prayer to watering it four ways: hauling from a well by hand; turning a water wheel with its buckets; channeling a running stream; and receiving drenching rain from heaven. The first asks the most of our labor and the last is pure gift, though grace enables every water from the first bucket up; the movement between them is the story of a praying life: God gradually taking over the watering. Her counsel to the haulers is tender, in substance: your labor pleases the Lord of the garden, and the rain is his to send when he will.

The Life; the garden and four waters begin in ch. 11.

ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

Imprisoned in Toledo, John composed a poem on the eternal spring: "For I know well the spring that flows and runs, although it is night." Stanza by stanza he confesses what he knows of that hidden fountain, its origin in the Father, its stream in the Son, its living water offered to every creature, and each stanza ends on the same refrain: although it is night. It is Session 6 and Session 7 in a single line: the water never stopped flowing; it was only dark.

From his poem "Song of the soul that rejoices in knowing God through faith," often called The Fountain: "For I know well the spring that flows and runs, although it is night."

ST. JOHN PAUL II

Calling the whole Church to depth at the start of the new millennium, St. John Paul II wrote that our Christian communities must become genuine schools of prayer, where the meeting with Christ is expressed not just in imploring help but in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening, and ardent devotion, "until the heart truly falls in love": a Christianity distinguished, he said, in the art of prayer. It is the charter for everything this study has practiced since Session 4, written for every parish and every dry land.

Novo Millennio Ineunte 32-33.

Live It This Week

- Each day this week, open your fifteen minutes with one line prayed slowly: "Lord, you thirst for me; I am here. Give me the living water." Then read John 4 across the week, a few verses a day.
- Once this week, drink a glass of water slowly and deliberately as a bodily prayer of thirst for the Holy Spirit. Let the body preach to the soul.
- Identify your current water (bucket, wheel, stream, rain) in one written sentence, without shame, and thank God for exactly that delivery.

MEMORY VERSE · JOHN 7:37

"If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink."

Before next session: Read Song of Songs 2:8-17 and 3:1-4, and John 20:11-18.

Catechism references for this session: CCC 2560, 2561, 694.