

## **The Precious Gift of Water**

“If there is magic on this planet, truly it is contained in water” (Loren Eiseley). My heart has been captured by water’s magic, and warms whenever I ponder it. As one who participated in our Sisters of Mercy International Reflection Process four years ago I had the opportunity to facilitate a local group whose focus was water. The discipline of planning and leading three retreat days on this topic over the next three years provided me with the opportunity to delve into it and recognize some very significant truths.

Most of us are willing to engage with something when we find it having impact on our personal lives. On the retreat the participants made lists of the multiple ways we use water in the course of a day. The wake-up cup of coffee or tea, brushing teeth, cooking, washing clothes and floors and bodies, watering plants and lawns - the list is endless. We use significant amounts of water that most of us take for granted and can so easily access with the turn of a faucet. I recognized clearly that I am absolutely dependent upon water to get through a day. In truth, there is no life without water.

Further, it is telling to consider one’s own relationship with water. What experiences have I had with it throughout my life, and how have those experiences shaped me? Many of my growing up years were lived close to the ocean. I loved going to the beach and being refreshed by the waves. My grandmother owned a cabin on a creek, and we spend hours swimming and crabbing in those waters. My dad made sure we all learned to swim, so pools and water safety figured in the mix. I learned to sail as well. So for me water invoked family, fun, food and refreshment.

My connection with water deepened into a sense of wonder as an adult, as I recognized how mesmerized I became with bodies of water. Bubbling brooks, flowing rivers, still ponds, crashing waves, captivated my imagination. As I grew in the spiritual life I realized with the psalmist, that this was “deep calling unto deep” (Ps 42). All of life emerged from water, and our bodies are largely composed of it, so I am actually experiencing a visceral connection to that from which I came. Being around water stills me and draws me inward. For me water is soothing, magnetic, contemplative. Water is the Creator’s gift for the entire world to share.

Theological education and my ministry as a liturgist have bestowed on me the gift of a sacramental worldview. All created reality comes from God’s very Self and is therefore a revelation of that Self. The love of God permeates everything. Pope Francis in his well-known

encyclical *Laudato Si'* said so beautifully that “everything is, as it were, a caress of God (#84)”. To gaze upon this magnificent world and feel in it the love message of God and God’s embrace is powerful beyond words. The sacramental use of water bespeaks cleansing, newness, life. Water provides us with a window into the depths of God and the life God desires for us.

So what happens when water is dirty, smelly, undrinkable - when pollution makes living water ugly and stagnant and full of disease? What happens when lakes and rivers and wells dry up, and people must walk miles to get even a little bit of usable water? What happens when multinational corporations buy up water rights to produce bottled water and drinks, leaving local people without this precious resource? What happens when sea levels rise and island dwellers see their sources of livelihood threatened or destroyed and their lives uprooted? What happens when animal life is threatened and food supplies diminished?

In these cases, the sacramentality of water is eclipsed, human dignity trampled and the joy of being alive which is the birthright of all replaced by misery and the struggle to simply survive. The shades are drawn on the recognition of God’s presence in all aspects of life, especially our brothers and sisters who are poor. We must acknowledge our complicity in this sin which denies the plan of love and union and justice God has for the world, and to which we have committed our lives. With the psalmist we must cry out “*How long, O Lord...how long?*” (*Ps 13: 2-4*)

The UN’s theme for World Water Day 2020 was “Water and Climate Change”. We are barraged these days with stories of bizarre, catastrophic climate events happening all over the globe. The agonizing suffering of those who are poorest and have the least resources to combat these events is heart-wrenching. It is easy to succumb to despair, especially for us in the US in light of the current political climate and administration. Yet we Christians are nothing if not people of indomitable hope. The resurrected, cosmic Christ gives us a vision of a transformed creation in which Christ is all in all. We are charged with being the face of that hope, witnessing God’s mercy and the promise of life to suffering peoples as well as to our suffering Earth. Let us not flinch from our commitment to the integrity and sacredness of Earth, and to working to assure that the gift of water is kept clean, affordable and available to all.

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February 2020