

*Lindenwood Christian Church*  
*Good Friday 2022*  
*John 19:28-29*

**“When Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), ‘I thirst.’ A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth.”**

Some thirty-five years ago the Missionaries of Charity—the religious sisters founded by Mother Teresa of Calcutta—came to minister to the poor in Memphis. They serve in an impoverished area of North Memphis, where the sisters still live. When I first visited their chapel, I was struck by the chapel’s simplicity, even its austerity.

What stands out most—and it’s in every chapel of communities founded by Mother Teresa—yes, what stands out most is a large crucifix behind the altar and the stark words painted in bold, black letters on the wall alongside it, “I THIRST.”

Friends: In the first of the four gospels, the Gospel of Mark, as Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane just before his arrest, he prays, **“Father...remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want”** (Mark 14:36). Indeed, Jesus did not want to drink of that cup of suffering. He shrank from it.

In the four passion stories, we see the crucified Jesus from four different angles. The last gospel written, St. John’s Gospel, sees Jesus in a much different light from its angle. Oh, when Jesus is arrested in the garden in the Fourth Gospel—you remember, Jesus scolded that impetuous Peter for drawing his sword to resist those who came to arrest the Master. Jesus told him, **“The cup the Father has given me—am I not to drink it?”** (John 18:11).

Not pushing the cup of suffering away—no, Jesus in St. John’s Gospel willingly takes that cup and drinks it. In fact, two verses before Jesus **“gives up his spirit”** and dies, he says, **“I thirst.”** Jesus wants to drink that cup of suffering to its dregs (1).

And he does. Sisters and brothers: As we keep our Good Friday vigil with Jesus, do we want to simply sip his cup of suffering, or rather drink it to its dregs?

**“I thirst.**

Mother Teresa of Calcutta died in 1997, after giving her life on behalf of the poorest of the poor. Some years after her death, her journal writings to her spiritual directors and her bishops—all written confidentially—were published. Earlier in her life, she had stunningly intimate experiences with Jesus in prayer. Astoundingly, it came to light in her journals that for the last 40 years of her life—except for a six-week interlude—Mother Teresa lived in a “dark night of the soul.” She wrote that her soul was a “block of ice.” When she prayed, she *felt* nothing. She never gave up and kept her deep prayer practices faithfully. She believed, but she felt no closeness in that belief to her God.

**“I thirst.”** Unknown to others, she drank the cup of suffering to its dregs.

When I was finishing my graduate work in Rome, in the summer of 1980, one night I received a phone call from the house of Missionaries of Charity who were serving at a relief center a short distance from the Coliseum. The sisters asked if I could come to their residence and celebrate with them the Eucharist at 6:00 a.m. When I arrived for Mass, I put on the liturgical robes and went to the altar. There were more nuns than usual. I looked out, and in the back row I saw Mother Teresa herself. Stunned, I tried to keep the focus on our shared worship, but I felt especially inept as I tried to preach in front of Mother Teresa!

After Mass, I was in the smallest of rooms, taking off my robes. I turned around, and right in front of me stood Mother Teresa—just the two of us. And she introduced herself to me, as if I didn’t know her. Then she said, “At the end of each day here, we give away all the food and clothing we have to the poor. The next morning, it happens—a new supply of food and clothing comes to us, enough for the day. Emptying ourselves, we have to trust in God.”

She was in the midst of her spiritual desert. She was emptying herself. **“I thirst,”** as Jesus said just before he died on the cross, so Mother Teresa said by her life, drinking fully from that cup of suffering.

**“I thirst.”** This Good Friday, emptying ourselves and trusting in God, shall we sip from the cup, or drink to its dregs?

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(1) See Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave*, volume 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1994) pp. 1072-74

