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It's a Dry Heat – Psalm 63

You've all seen the cartoon, I'm sure, of a skeleton sitting in a lawn chair, captioned "But it's a dry heat." I've been in places where it's over one hundred degrees with one hundred percent humidity, and places where it's over a hundred and twenty and near-zero humidity, and I can tell you with great conviction that they're both hot.

And they're both dangerous, even deadly.

Marine Corps Air-Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, California is one of those truly ferociously hot places, dry as dust. A large part of it is hardened lava, black, so when you get close to the ground, it's even hotter. When I was stationed there, we had a mandatory thirty-day acclimatization period before you were fit for full duty – learning to keep hydrated, the warning signs you're in trouble, etc.

A tough young Marine transferred into my unit not long after I arrived myself. So tough, in fact, that he figured this getting-used-to-the-heat rule was for someone else, not him, and managed to bluff his way onto a trip to the rifle range his second day there. Of course, this

being a Marine base, there were no frills, so everyone marched the five miles to and from the range with their rifle and gear.

I was in my office, right across from sick bay, late that afternoon, when a platoon came down the street, including two Marines mostly carrying a third, whom they hauled into medical. It looked pretty frantic, so I went over to check out what was going on.

Well, our boy who snuck out into the field had managed to stay under the radar of everyone – mainly since no one knew him yet – and not only should he not have been out there on the range, he didn't drink any water. He was dry as dust. They were pushing IV fluids into him as fast as they could while the ambulance was on its way to take him to the base hospital, from whence a helicopter took him to a major medical center in Los Angeles.

Here's what happened: he basically cooked the part of his brain that regulates body temperature. He was given a medical discharge, and told that he could not stay for more than a few minutes anywhere the temperature was above sixty-five degrees - for the rest of his life. I learned six months later that he'd gotten sick of that, gone to the mall with his girlfriend, and died.

The moral of this cautionary tale is that you cannot beat the heat by sheer willpower. What's important for us is to realize that this is true whether that heat is physical or spiritual.

King David also was a tough guy. If anyone could overcome either kind of heat, David would have my vote. But, probably from experience, he knows better: listen to David's words while he's in the wilderness of Judah. He's got a thirst. But it's not just a thirst for a drink of water: he seeks water for his soul, just like the desert soil cries out for rain. (Text)

Not all water is appealing, true enough. There are lots of alternatives that we prefer, particularly if we think we're just going to get plain old water out of the faucet. The tap water where I grew up came from a lake, Independence Lake, and was treated with chlorine: hold a glass of it up and you could see all sorts of things floating around. Visitors always complained that it tasted terrible.

Tasted like water to me. Of course, I'm happy to drink Green Valley water, too...

Still, my kids do their best to drink anything else but water. Luckily they prefer milk.

But people will drink whatever they can get when things get bad enough – I've even known people to drink from the water fountain in the office suite.

The thing is, too often too many of us need a sign that things *are* getting bad enough, that our bodies or our souls (or both) are drying out, that we need to drink *now*. Until that point, well, we just keep on going.

For many, they never do realize what they need, where to find it, or, worse, can't bring themselves to drink it when there are so many other things around that may seem to help for a time.

This has been an amazing week for the message of Christ, for the living water of the Spirit. The phenomenon of Francis has been growing since he was elected to lead the Roman Catholic Church, but for Americans, his visit here has been nothing short of a wake-up call for millions: a call to drink. By his words, through his actions, he has revealed to many a desperate thirst they didn't know they had. Oh, we've been thirsty for a long time; we've been drained by the heat of tragedy, anger, conflict, hatred, greed, consumption, and self-involvement. But most people have been able to ignore the warning signs, just like the guy who after being offered a bottle of water says, "No thanks, I'm good," and then passes out.

Now, at least for a moment (or a news cycle), it's undeniable that a deep thirst for God water is out there. The crowds lining the routes, the people glued to their TV screens, many not Catholic or Christian, but recognizing that this man, Francis, has something they want, qualities they admire, embodies something of who they want to be, represents what their souls are crying for, and finding themselves – to their great surprise – willing to listen, if only for a while.

The world is a desperately thirsty place. All sorts of people, of every background and belief, feel it. As one commentator said, using the Gospel of Luke's report that even the ruthless King Herod wanted to meet Jesus: "[Herod] is intrigued... [We] are told that Herod [also] 'liked to listen' to John the Baptist. So Herod is similar to many men and women of our time who feel drawn to the word of God, but also have a hard time accepting it. [Seeing the intense interest so many have in Francis and his message] is a reminder [for us] to treat each person, even people who might be opposed to the Christian message, with care. The message of... Francis's pontificate has been mainly one of mercy and compassion, of understanding and forgiveness, and also one directed towards caring for the poor and marginalized. ...Not everyone is open to this message, and some of these insights, particularly around economic and environmental matters, can be threatening...

"Nonetheless, even for those in opposition to these basic Christian truths, there is in all of us an innate desire to hear the word of God." (Fr. James Martin, SJ, on JesuitPrayer.org)

You know, that thirst isn't just *out there*, it's *in here*, too. Getting people to drink God's! Argh! Like trying to get my kids to drink tap water. "You can lead a horse..." How many Bible classes can we offer that so few attend? How many workshops on prayer? How many are willing to, as David says, "behold [God] in the sanctuary"? How many

of us pray, even daily, let alone throughout our waking hours? How many of us have piles of questions about prayer, about the Bible, about Jesus Christ, but never get around to asking them, or are too embarrassed to ask? If David was thirsty, maybe we should be, too.

So those who have found the waters of God, like David, have to show the thirsty where the water is. Particularly now, when the masses have just realized how thirsty they are, and before they forget.

Where is that water? David says “in the sanctuary.” Other translations say in holiness or worship. That means that in this humble room (grand as it is by human standards), *we* ought to be able to behold God’s “power and glory.” Hm. If we aren’t, maybe we aren’t seeing correctly.

Coming here on Sunday isn’t about me or Diane or Paul or the choir or even our friends – it’s coming to consciously be in the presence of God (sure he’s always around, but the key here is *consciously*), and worship. That’s where the water is: God’s word in Scripture, in worship, as God speaks to us – and in service, “which is your spiritual worship” as the Apostle Paul says (Romans 12:1), giving of whatever you have – including yourself – in the name of the one who gives us everything.

You see? The water’s everywhere – but do you recognize it? Let yourself take it in?

God's water is in the word. It's in the music. It's in the worship. It's in the prayers. It's in our coming together. It comes through you, too, outside these walls, when you share a little of yourself: a little kindness, a little love, a little smile. It's openly living your faith without getting in the way of those looking for any excuse to turn away from the water of God.

Life is, itself, a dry heat – a furnace, a crucible, a place where we are heated up, and by the grace of God, refined, our impurities burnt off, so the beautiful soul that God carefully crafted in each and every one of us can come out, and “our lips shall praise [God].” May the waters of the spirit wash away the dirt that covers the ore of your soul, and even more important, may you find the water of God that will keep you strong and courageous as you trek through the heat of this dry, dry land.