

Thirsting for God

-Veronica Lawson RSM

It is 1st February, feast of St. Brigid, and I wake up thinking about water, probably because I went to bed at 12.35 am thinking about water. I had stayed up to watch the lunar eclipse, the super blood red moon in the star-lit sky. Observing the moon through my recently acquired pre-loved binoculars had brought to mind the tides and the wonder of gravitational forces and the extraordinary interconnection of all that is. I am yet to learn that the super blood red moon is partially responsible for a king tide that has left a trail of devastation in the Torres Strait Islands.

Shielded as I am from the plight of the Torres Strait Islander communities and the damage to the Reef itself, I focus on St Brigid. My mind wanders back some 25 years to Kildare, Ireland, when a Mercy friend and I went in search of Brigid's well. Our trusty guide book had informed us that we would find it just 50 metres from the Japanese Tea Garden. We cleared away the undergrowth and came upon the well. We prayed at this neglected shrine, retrieved an abandoned soft drink can, filled it with water from the well and continued on our pilgrimage to the Holy Wells of Ireland.

On St. Brigid's feast day in 2018, I give thanks for the gift of water without which there is no life. I give thanks for the asteroid or whatever it was that first brought water to our planetary home. I ponder what it means to be among the privileged inhabitants of planet Earth who have access to clean drinking water. I do not take this for granted. What more must I do? Do our "simple daily gestures" make a difference? I have to believe that they do.

Radio National brings news of a water crisis in Capetown. Severe water restrictions have already been put in place. Drought and political manoeuvrings are both at play in this crisis. Rainfall might bring some relief, but management of the rain that falls must be prudent and just. Neither is assured in that parched land. South Africa is no different, it seems, from so many other parts of the planet when it comes to respecting or exploiting Earth's precious resources.

I take a book from the shelf: "Fear death by water," cautions T.S. Eliot's Madame Sosostris in Part 1 of *The Waste Land*. I ponder the water motif that permeates this work, alluding as it does now to death and now to rebirth. "If

there were water we should stop and drink...but there is no water". My brother's scribbled note in the margin of my inherited copy of the *Selected Poems of T.S. Eliot* states that water here "stands for virility and new life". With the wisdom of six decades of hindsight, he might express it more inclusively now, even if his observation is in essence right. Water in *The Waste Land* is engaged both literally and metaphorically: the death by drowning of Eliot's sailor friend at the Dardanelles, the cultural wasteland created by war and the yearning for new life, for rebirth. There is no plan for the future here, no prognosis, just the occasional faint glimmer of hope: "Shall I at least set my lands in order?" I ask myself what it means in our times to set our lands in order so that all may know the "Shantih" that Eliot evokes-the peace that passes understanding.

I turn to the age-old wisdom of the Book of Psalms. The heart-felt lament of a returning exile in Psalm 42 becomes my prayer: "As the deer longs for flowing streams, so my *nephesh* [my whole being] longs for you, O God. My *nephesh* thirsts for God, for the living God." Like the psalmist, I thirst for the living God and, like the deer, I long for the flowing streams that bring life to Earth's diverse communities. My *nephesh*, my whole being, longs for justice and for right relationship. Along with countless others, I thirst for an end to the hydraulic fracturing that pollutes the streams and lines the pockets of the super wealthy. I long for the courage to walk more lightly on the planet, to live more simply so that those who are threatened by rising tides, those fearing death by water and those who thirst for water, might simply live.

"Why are you cast down, my *nephesh*, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God...." There is every reason to be downcast-about the Western Cape, about the Torres Strait, about the Murray-Darling Basin. I tell myself that we can only linger in that space of disquiet while we join the search for answers. "Send out your light and your truth. Let them lead me". We must hope in God and in those through whom God works. Graham Farquhar, eminent scientist and 2018 Australian Senior of the Year, comes to mind. God's light and God's truth are mediated in our times through those who, like Graham, give their lives to finding and making accessible a way through the seeming impasse. I give thanks for such wisdom. I become aware once more that we are in God and God is in us, calling us into a future beyond greed and self-centred control of Earth's super-abundant resources, a future where the thirst of all God's creatures might be quenched.

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