

THIRST FOR GOD

Readings Is 55: 10-11; John 4: 5-14

We all come to Lourdes for our own reasons. We come with our own needs and hopes and fears.

We gather here with our sick pilgrims – you are at the centre of our pilgrimage. We come to pray with you and for you. Your presence here will, I hope, bring you comfort and strength. But your presence here also does something very important for us who are healthy. You prompt us to recognise how fragile our lives are; you prompt us to realise and to express with you **our** need for healing and strength.

Since we gathered here last year, the whole world seems much more fragile. The high hopes at the beginning of the new millennium seem to have evaporated. September 11th showed us that everyone everywhere is vulnerable. The increasingly dreadful situation in the land where Jesus lived and preached his Gospel of life and peace makes us wonder if peace will ever be found there.

The world is restless. People seek consolation and escape in alcohol and other drugs, in wealth, in fame, in power, in glamour. But we are restless for more than any of these things can offer. There is no lasting peace for the human spirit except by recognising that we are restless for God. Only God's word can truly satisfy us.

Saint Ita, a patron of our diocese, was give the name Ita or Íde as a nickname. The Irish word íota means a parching thirst. She was thirsty; she was parched for God.



That is the fundamental truth about each of us – *we are parched for God*. All our seeking, all our hoping, all our fears, all our longings are an expression of that fundamental truth – we are parched for God.

Here in this Grotto the Lady told Bernadette to drink from the waters of the spring. This Grotto, therefore, is a symbol of her Son's promise that he would become for us 'a spring of water, welling up to eternal life'. He is the one we thirst for.

What Mary showed to Bernadette was a symbol of her Son who offers us the water which alone can satisfy our thirst.

At the Grotto, our Lady invites us to realise that. With all the pain and worry and fragility we bring, we need to know that the love of her Son is greater than everything we fear.

'If you but knew the gift of God', Jesus said. If we open our hearts to recognise humbly how parched we are, we will begin to recognise the greatness of God's gift. That is the message Mary brought to Bernadette – and to us – at the Grotto.

“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.” Whatever the pain, whatever the restlessness, whatever the worry any of us has, Jesus is inviting us to drink the water he gives.

In his Passion, he suffered betrayal, pain, mockery, injustice and death. But the love of God is more powerful than any of that. He rose to the eternal life that is welling up in us through him.

That is why we come to the Grotto to celebrate the Eucharist, the Church’s prayer of thanksgiving. Even the most parching thirst can be quenched in the living water: “Sing praise to the Lord for he has done gloriously... God is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation”

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