

Msgr. Bill's Weekly Letter...

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We all experience two kinds of thirst in life, and unless we understand the difference between them, we will always be frustrated.

The first kind of thirst is horizontal thirst. We thirst, we desire, the good things of this earth: food, drink, companionship, fun, entertainment, a nice house, a good income, success at work or school. It is part of our nature to desire these things; there's nothing wrong with them.

But we also have another kind of thirst, vertical thirst. This is a deeper thirst, a deeper desire. It is a desire for meaning and purpose. This desire is also built into our nature. There is nothing we can do to destroy it, just as there is nothing, we can do to destroy our natural desires for food and water.

But unlike horizontal thirst, our vertical thirst cannot be satisfied by our own efforts. Only God himself can satisfy it. And he created us like that on purpose. It is as if he put a homing device in the very core of our being, and it constantly draws us towards him, towards intimate, personal, contact with his eternal, transcendent love.

This is why even when all of our horizontal thirsts are satisfied, when we have money, success, and pleasure, we are still restless. Our deeper, vertical thirst can't be satisfied by things of this world. As the Catechism puts it: "*Man is made to live in communion with God, in whom he finds happiness*" (CCC #45). The meaning and purpose which alone will give us true happiness comes from friendship with God in Christ, not from worldly success, pleasures, and human relationships.

When we forget that, when we try to satisfy our vertical thirst with horizontal stuff, we put ourselves on the road to frustration, tragedy, and disappointment. We all know this - that's why we're here today.

But the world around us is always trying to change our minds, to convince us that the vertical thirst is just an illusion, that we really can satisfy all the longings of our hearts just with earthly treasures and pleasures.

That is one of the devil's favorite lies. If he can confuse us into thinking that our vertical thirst is just part of our horizontal thirst, then we won't even come and ask for God's guidance and gifts!

God created us with a thirst for his friendship, for divine wisdom, and for everlasting truth and love not in order to torture us, but to lead us towards the real paradise. But when we let ourselves be seduced by plastic paradises instead, his treasures go undiscovered, and our desires go unsatisfied.

As the Catechism puts it: *The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself.* (CCC #27)

Pope Benedict XVI's message for Lent (2008) tells us how to keep these two thirsts in proper perspective.

The secret is almsgiving, generously using our own goods to help satisfy the thirsts of others. When Jesus' disciples return from the town where they went to buy lunch, the Samaritan woman rushes back into town.

The disciples start unpacking their grocery bags and offering lunch to Jesus. But he looks at them and says, "I have food to eat of which you do not know."

The disciples are puzzled. They wonder if the woman may have already given him some food. So Jesus explains, "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to finish his work."

Jesus teaches us that our vertical thirst is far more important than our horizontal thirst.

If we make it our first priority to satisfy that vertical thirst, to love God and to love our neighbor, then the horizontal thirsts will also be taken care of.

As long as we are striving to follow God's plan for our lives, he will take care of us, even if it means bringing water out of a rock.

God's will for us is to love one another, to care as much about the needs of those around us, both material and spiritual, as we do about our own needs. To think well of others, to speak well of others, and to act well towards others, that is what almsgiving is all about.

Jesus will teach us this lesson by his own example when he gives us his very self in Holy Communion during Mass. When he does, let us ask him to show us how we can follow in his footsteps during the week to come.

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