

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time / Villanueva Weekend
Nov. 7 & 8, 2020

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I am blessed to be among you today as you are champions of love and justice, so badly needed in our world today. As the apostle Matthew said in 5:6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." This is so true of you my fellow parishioners, so I am honored to share this reflection

But, I'm not going to talk about Matthew today, but rather reflect on one of the psalms # 63: 2 "O Lord, you are my God whom I seek; for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water." The psalmist uses the soul thirsting for God as a metaphor, but in other parts of our world, this thirst is literal and very real.

Picture it. You've traveled in February to Nicaragua with others from St. Lucy's and All Saints, and it's 100 degrees. It's your first full day with our sister parish members in Villanueva. Moving from your plastic chair in the education center to a hammock hung near a side wall dampens your brow. There are no air conditioners, only a couple of small fans, no match for the oppressive heat. You feel, as the psalmist described: parched, lifeless and without water. Then, you imagine it...a tall glass sitting on the counter, sweat droplets sliding down its sides, ice cubes crackling as they dance in cool clean water. You yearn for its sweet, chilly relief.

But wait. You're in Nicaragua, and water is scarce. There will be no long, refreshing drink of water. Studies show that 1 in 10 of these people don't have clean water. For those of us who simply go to a tap, this is difficult to imagine.

Though Nicaragua has abundant sources of fresh water, they are often difficult to access. [According to WaterAid](#), an organization aimed at providing the world with safe drinking water, water quality in [Nicaragua](#) is poor, and water is seldom considered safe to drink. Of a population of nearly 6 million, about 800,000 Nicaraguans lack access to improved water sources. Furthermore, at least 100 children die annually from diseases such as diarrhea, which is largely caused by unsafe drinking water and poor sanitation. Much of Nicaragua's water is unsafe due to contamination from chemicals used in mining and agriculture. In addition, 1 in 4, or approximately 1.6 million people were estimated to have no access to reliable toilets.

So, by the end of your first full day as a visitor, you've realized that for the next week this is your reality, too.

When I was there, I was fortunate to have a toilet in my hostess' house. However, it had a shower curtain surrounding it with no walls, which resulted in very little privacy. But other travelers stayed with a woman who doesn't have an indoor toilet and has suffered from a urinary tract infection for over 10 years because of it.

Sleeping, even with the windows open at night, is sticky business under your mosquito net. On my second day, I woke up definitely wanting a shower. So, I headed outside to a concrete hut containing a small sink, a wooden pallet to stand on and a huge plastic vat of cold water. A plastic jug, like our milk jugs floated in the water. I was to stand on the pallet and dump water over myself to wash. To say the least, I was reluctant.

Outside, Candida was washing our clothes with a stone and a small amount of water. Our hosts washed our clothes daily to earn a little bit of money. On the street, neighbors walked past carrying pails, all moving toward a communal source of water from which to fill them.

Daily we traveled to remote villages to immerse ourselves in their worlds. Back together at dinner, we'd share our experiences. Rick, a fellow traveler, came back from his trip in awe. He watched a man digging a well. The man had dug his well by hand and was so far down, Rick couldn't even see him. He had been working approximately three months and the hole was forty-five feet deep. He estimated it would require another month and three meters to hit ground water. Even then, they would not have portable water. They may have water to wash the children, animals and their clothing.

Our neighbors literally thirst for the basic necessities of life, But, one thing we learned while there was that it seemed that their souls were less thirsty for God than our souls, Americans who have so much more.

They sang, danced, hugged us, laughed and spoke to us" even when they couldn't speak English and we couldn't speak Spanish. They worked hard to cook over wood fires to serve us meat they rarely bought for themselves. Lucas protected us, making sure as we traveled that we avoided any possible danger. They welcomed us, and despite their limited resources, shared everything they had with us. They were so grateful we were there, proud to show us their work as educators and *brigadistas* in remote communities. They truly enjoyed our company and made us feel as we were one and right at home.

Today, in America, we need to look to our Villanueva brothers and sisters to learn how to quench our thirst for the soul. Trust in, reliance upon and constant connection with our God is key to survival. In addition, deliberately practicing gratitude for all we do have rather than what we are missing during this pandemic will bring us more joy. Finally, to live more simply, choose more joy, celebrate our differences and commit to take care of one another will heal our spiritual wounds.

In the Spring of 2020, thanks to your generosity, we were able to send extra funds to Villanueva for decontamination kits for the *brigadistas*. One of the *brigadistas* described their being traumatized by the pandemic but being able to carry on and that visiting the health center has been more complicated. The pandemic has also had an effect on their economic network. Many of the families have relatives who are working in other countries. But, during the pandemic, those foreign workers have not been able to work and send money home each month as they did previously.

As we, in the United States have suffered the drought of hatred and division of our souls in 2020, may we remember our people in Villanueva, give generously to those in need and work hard to put politics behind us. Let's look to 2021 as an opportunity to quench our thirst and return to and carry out God's second greatest commandment: Love thy neighbor as thyself.

If you are able to make a donation, please do. If not, please pray for them, for that is what they believe helps them most. Your prayers make them feel less alone. Thank you.