

## **A Cup of Blessing**

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*Food for Thought:* “The Waiter Appears Again”

by Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes

Drink deeply of this life, my friend.  
Don't sip to make it last in fear of running out.  
The waiter keeps coming by, refilling our glasses.  
Drink deeply of who you are,  
the magnificent happening of you.  
Drain the glass. Take big swigs of this day,  
swish it around in your mouth a little,  
even the hard or boring parts.  
You are alive, and it's good.  
Each moment drink it in.  
Drink deeply of the grace God gives you,  
the blessing, the presence, the love;  
refilling your glass before it's half empty.  
Taste it. Savor it. Have some more.  
Even if you do it as a game,  
to make the waiter reappear again and again, drink it in.  
Look at you, filling yourself up with God.

*Scripture:* Matthew 10:42-40

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: “Those who welcome you welcome me; and those who welcome me welcome the One who sent me. Those who welcome a prophet because that person is a prophet will have a prophet's reward; and those who welcome the righteous because they are righteous will have the reward of the righteous. Those who give so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because they are my disciples, then I tell you solemnly, they will most certainly not lose their reward.”

I made a visit to Sky Farm Hermitage a year ago for a 24-hour private retreat. Sister Michela welcomed me to Sky Farm and gave me a tour of the grounds. She showed me to my private place of meditation: a huge wine vat that had been converted into a space large enough for a bed, desk and a chair, a dresser, and a lamp, with two windows that looked out on the golden rolling hills of Sonoma.

Sister Michaela introduced me to the teaching on the early monastic movement of the Desert Fathers. She pulled two books off of the small library shelves for me to read during my 24-hour silent retreat. They were *Being Still: Reflections on an Ancient Mystical Tradition*, by Jean-Yves Leloup, and *Heaven Begins With You*, by Anselm Gruen. From *Heaven Begins With You*, I learned about the practice of staying in one's kellion. (A kellion is defined simply as a cell in a monastery, and it can be thought of as one's prayer sanctuary.) To stay in one's kellion is to stay in a place of constant conversation with God and with one's self. The kellion becomes a place of honesty and humility and truth and joy.

From *Being Still* I learned of a prayer practice which I really loved, and forgot about until this past week. This prayer practice comes to us from Father Seraphim from Mt. Athos, who drew his images first from nature and then from humanity. To paraphrase Father Searphim, he says:

Ask a mountain how it prays. The mountain replies, "Sit down, simply be without purpose, without aim. Take your time, greet the seasons as they come and go. See without judging. See permanence. Feel eternity. Ask a poppy how it prays. The poppy turns toward the sun, it turns toward beauty; it has a straight stem that is capable of bending. It blooms, and it withers. It is impermanent, it is finite. Ask the ocean how it prays. The ocean prays like breath – in and out, ebb and flow, high tide, low tide; waves on the surface, calm below. Ask a bird how it prays. A bird delights in singing, or cooing like a dove. The bird says, "Let the song rise in you, whatever it is at this moment: delight or the blues, or lament, or exuberant joy.

Next we move to humanity. We move to the faith of Abraham (and I will add Sarah right alongside him). Ask Sarah and Abraham how they prayed. They had an awareness of what they described as a voice calling them. They had an awareness of a *Thou*, a presence, a spirit that was manifest in the intimate exchange of all things. Consider this beautiful line: "The difference between Nature and God is the difference between the blue of the sky and the blue of one's eyes." Abraham and Sarah were in search of those eyes. How did Abraham and Sarah pray? They prayed through looking into people's eyes and offering them hospitality, knowing their thirst, never giving up on God's love. The glass of water you give to the one who is thirsty does not disturb your silence; it brings you to its very source. Pray like a mountain, like a poppy, like an ocean, like a bird, like Abraham and Sarah.

One more person of whom Father Seraphim spoke is Jesus. When Jesus was feeling agitated or pressed for time, he would sit like a mountain. Whenever he felt pride or conceit, he would remember how a poppy withers after all of its shining time. When sadness, anger, or distrust overtook him, Jesus would breathe like the ocean, and rediscover his breath in the breath of God. When he felt joy with his friends he would sing; when he felt anger at the hypocrites, they heard his voice loud and clear. When Jesus saw human suffering, misfortune or weakness, he would nurture, and heal, and gather the community around like Abraham. And this is why he said to his disciples, “When you offer a cup of water to someone in the spirit of love, I am with you, you are with me, you are with the creator of all.”

I love how my seminary colleague Steve Garnaas-Holmes grasps this fullness of presence in the image of a glass of water on a restaurant table. You empty it and the waiter keeps filling it back up again. In times like we are living in now it is hard to know what to do, and we know that there is so much that needs to be done. Right now, this morning, there is one thing to do, and that is to share in the sacrament of communion. The way that we share this bread and this cup can be for us a time to practice how we look into the eyes of people that we see in the weeks and months ahead. Let us be looking for those eyes that reveal the soul of the person, the Creator.

Amen.