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For Sunday, August 2, 2015

Hunger in the Desert

This Sunday's Scripture Readings

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

<http://new.usccb.org/bible/readings/080215.cfm>

Exodus 16:2-4, 12-15

Ephesians 4:17, 20-24

John 6:24-35



There it is! Right outside my window. I'm here in the [Negev Desert of Israel](#). It's possible that Moses and the chosen people walked in this area a few thousand years ago. Right now at 4:30 PM, the temperature is 103.6 degrees in the shade. Just two weeks ago, at about this time of day, we went for a ride in the desert. Travel books recommend drinking a quart of water an hour, if walking. Our water bottles were full. Our hats were on. Our desert shoes were ready if we needed to walk for a better view. We were about two hours out when roaring up and over a

mound, we landed with a jolt. We were up to the hubcaps in a bed of loose sand. The car quit.

I trekked up the trace of the road and saw camel tracks in the sand. No other vehicles in sight. Our two guides were working on the car and got it started. We sipped our water. Everything, including the water, was hot! They dug the tires clear and laid canvas behind them. Three of us pushed as one steered backwards... back and back until he cleared the mound. The motor was hot! All of our drinking water went into the radiator.

Evening shadows began creeping over the desert. We were warned not to go out into the desert at night. Snakes and scorpions come out after dark. There was great relief and many "alleluias" when we got back to home base.

Reflecting on this and looking at the desert in front of me, I marvel over Moses leading the chosen people through these wildernesses. As I look around, there is nothing, absolutely

nothing, to eat out there. Desiccated acacia trees dot the landscape, along with thorny scrub. Can humans eat wood? Are the weeds edible? There are so many thorns!

While there is a little green at the edge of a wadi, no water is visible this time of the year. How deep would we have to dig to find some? Our small group could have survived until morning, but what about the multitude with Moses? Had I lived in those days, I would have been one of the complainers wanting to go back!

God was marvelously compassionate as he listened to all the groaning rising up from that desert. Instead of losing patience with them and sending punishment, God gave the grumblers new signs of love... bread, but only enough for the day. Still the complaints pierced the heavens. God sent quail. Yes, there are quail here even now. About three families rush across our roads, chicks all aflutter. In spring, the migrations are superabundant. God is so generous! He gave them meat as well as bread.

God had worked mightily to free these people from slavery. But they forgot about all of that. God has worked mighty works—*mighty works*—to save us! But we forget! Most of us don't have the opportunity to live in the desert, but sometimes, in our hearts, we walk in a very arid place. We lose hope because it is so dry, so empty. We thirst for love. We hunger for the bread of appreciation and success. We may even want to give up in our forward progress to the Promised Land. We complain. It is too hard. I want consolation. I want rewards for my struggles. I want to return to the fleshpots of old, easier ways. We grumble and grouse. God never loses patience. Infinite compassion is God's name. But just as God gave food for the day to the Israelites, God gives us what we need for the day. We even pray as Jesus taught us, "Give us this day!" That food is God's very self. What more could we want?

Jesus tells the hungry crowd of his day that he himself is the bread of life. In their desert, he promised they would never hunger, they would never thirst. But what food was Jesus talking about? What drink? The crowd had experienced physical food and an easy handout. Their hands were stretched out for more of that! They wanted the security that their ancestors wanted. Long-term security! Not just for today!

Jesus himself struggled with this temptation. "Turn these stones into bread," the evil one suggested. "Satisfy your hunger." "Go back to the fleshpots of Egypt." But, no, he resisted. He trusted his beloved Father would take care of him. Jesus moved forward in his desert in trust, in faith. He wants us to take that same leap of faith. He wants us to "believe in the one he [God] sent."

Am I in a desert? What do I hunger for? What do I thirst for? Can I trust that God himself is the only satisfaction for those yearnings?

Patricia DeGroot, ObISB

PRAYER

I will sing to the LORD, for he is gloriously triumphant;
horse and chariot he has cast into the sea.
My strength and my refuge is the LORD,
and he has become my savior.
This is my God, I praise him;

the God of my father, I extol him.
The LORD is a warrior,
LORD is his name!
Pharaoh's chariots and army he hurled into the sea;
the elite of his officers were drowned in the Red Sea.
The flood waters covered them,
they sank into the depths like a stone.
Your right hand, O LORD, magnificent in power,
your right hand, O LORD, shattered the enemy.
In your great majesty you overthrew your adversaries;
you loosed your wrath to consume them like stubble...

In your love you led the people you redeemed;
in your strength you guided them to your holy dwelling...

You brought them in, you planted them
on the mountain that is your own—
The place you made the base of your throne, LORD,
the sanctuary, LORD, your hands established.
May the LORD reign forever and ever!

—Exodus 15:1b-7, 13, 17-18. Scripture text taken from the NABRE © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 CCD, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

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Registration for the 2016 World Youth Day officially began on July 26, 2015. For information on registering for WYD, visit <http://www.krakow2016.com/en/informacie-en>. You can also find more information and resources from the USCCB at <http://www.usccb.org/about/world-youth-day/wyduusa-news-and-updates.cfm>.

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