

I want you to think back to a time when you have been hungry. Really hungry.

For me, it was a ten-day course in survival for the US Navy. We were dropped off in the high desert in California, and one part of the exercise was “living off of the land.” I’m not sure how many of you know much about the edible plants that grow wild in the high-desert ... but I don’t think it would be a very thick book. Maybe only a pamphlet.

There was the prickly-pear cactus. Of course, you had to peel the prickly part off before you could eat it. By the time most people got part-way through, their fingers were pretty raw, and the cactus didn’t look very appetizing any more.

There was this plant that looked like a skinny weed, and tasted like broccoli. Now, if you don’t like broccoli, that’s not very tempting. But when you’re hungry, it’s just a skinny little weed.

And then there were the bugs, but I don’t want to get into that part of the training.

But hunger is a peculiar thing. Because after a few days, you sort of forget that you’re hungry. The first few days are terrible, but when there isn’t much food around, you just fall into a pattern of being hungry and not paying too much attention to it.

In today’s first reading, the prophet Isaiah speaks out to those who are thirsty, and tells them to “come to the water” and to “come eat without cost.”

He is speaking to us.

And what he is offering us is spiritual food.

Today is the Baptism of the Lord. And it is the beginning of the first phase of ordinary time. For a good many of us, our own baptism happened when we were children. And for the ones of us who were baptized at an age when we could remember, I would think that there was an initial “rush” of the Spirit of God.

I can say there is the same “rush” with ordination; and I can guess that the same thing happens with marriage – and any of the other sacraments.

But there’s the old line “the honeymoon’s over.”

Why is that?

If the initial graces of any sacrament is a “rush” of the Spirit ... how do we go from “swimming” in a sea of graces to standing in the middle of a desert?

It’s like we’ve gotten used to being spiritually hungry, and we just take for granted that hungry or thirsty is the way things are.

But, I don't think that's where we're supposed to be. I don't think we're supposed to be in a spiritual desert ... hungry and thirsty spiritually.

In the first reading we hear about God's Word coming down like rain and making the earth fruitful and blossoming; and in the second reading we hear about the testimony of the Spirit of God, and the water and the blood.

The water is baptism, which is our initial "rush" of supernatural graces. And the blood is the Eucharist – communion – which is our spiritual nourishment.

But if this leaves us hungry, or if this leaves us thirsty – what do we do?

I would propose that the answer to this is in prayer.

Ignatius of Loyola counseled that in consolation – that is, when everything is going well – go with the flow.

But in desolation – that is, when things seem a bit dryer or dimmer than they were – he counsels that we should stick with what we knew worked.

So, what does this mean?

Did you used to pray with your spouse or your family, but things have gotten a bit busy with sports and school and work – and you sort of slacked off on praying?

Well, why not pick it up again.

Did you used to spend more time reading God's Word, but things just piled up and it's been weeks or months or more since you've really sat and soaked in the Scriptures?

Well, why not dive into that again.

And, as we heard in the Gospel, where God speaks to Jesus "you are my beloved, with you I am well pleased."

Let us take this week to pray with that message, that promise – that is, God speaking to us: "You are my beloved, with you I am well pleased."

Let us take this week and really say with the psalmist: "My strength and my courage is the Lord and he has been my savior!"

Let us go back to that ocean of grace, and let us "draw water joyfully" from the abundance of God's grace. Because we are most definitely God's beloved daughters and sons, in whom he is most certainly well pleased.