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Giving up coffee to be spiritually quenched

April Gutierrez | Feb. 23, 2012 Young Voices

My husband likes to boast that he has been drinking coffee since he was knee-high on his father's leg. Coffee is a habit I figured I would never acquire, as I avoided the habit even in college. But when the second month of sleepless nights with a newborn kicked in, I surrendered, and the addiction formed.

It started with the frozen specialty drinks. Frappuccinos turned into mochas, and mochas turned into dark roast with a little bit of cream.
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As my son enters his third year, I enjoy regular sleep, yet still have that sharp acidic habit. I look forward each morning to that delicious smell of the coffee beans and the hum of their grinding. I sit with sweet anticipation of holding it with both hands cupped snugly around the mug.

Equally satisfying is the communal aspect of coffee drinking -- meeting a dear friend in a quaint café to gossip about the week or collecting mugs and beans from shops all over the world. Being a coffee connoisseur also fits comfortably with my values, as I serve fair trade and organic cups to guests in my home.

For Lent, I chose to give up all liquids except water in support of the H20 Project [1]. I will drink only water for 40 days and give the money I would have spent on coffee, soda and other drinks to help give access to safe drinking water throughout the world.

Water is one of the most profound and accessible sacred images. Many of the Gospel stories involve water: Jesus talks with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, offering a spring of water welling up to eternal life; Mary invites Jesus to turn water into wine at the wedding at Cana; Jesus rebukes the wind and waves; the disciples leave their fishing nets to follow Jesus. When asked to think of a calm place, many immediately think of a beach.

When I feel a migraine coming on, I often will take a shower, allowing the heat and peaceful sound take the stress out of my shoulders. Most significantly, water quenches my thirst like nothing else after a workout or on a hot summer day.

I have chosen to focus on water for a variety of reasons. First, clean water projects rank the highest in helping developing countries [2]. Second, the focus on water will vividly impact my prayer life. Third and most significantly, "every 20 seconds a child dies from a water related illness." [3] What an incredibly simple concept that can have a great impact.

Additionally, the Tread Lightly calendar [4] will be a resource in educating and challenging my understanding of the issue by remembering my baptism, water fasting and centering prayer.

Just as Jesus offered the woman at the well living water, a spring welling up to eternal life, I find myself wondering how my 40 days of water will affect my physical body. Why do we drink so many liquids with so many components, ingredients and chemicals when all our bodies really want is water? Do I make this trade in other areas of my life? Will I discover in this Lenten season that I have replaced Christ with something else,

something as deliciously addictive, tempting or comforting as coffee? Maybe I'll find my thirst quenched, more fully and perfectly than ever before.

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[1] http://www.water.cc/
[2] http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/february/popular-strategies-helping-the-poor.html?start=2
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