

Homily for the Third Sunday of Lent  
March 15, 2020  
By Thomas Joseph

Today's readings are centered on Baptism and new life. The readings make use of the symbol of *water* to refer to our relationship with God. *Water* represents God's Spirit Who comes to us in Baptism. Baptism is the outward, symbolic sign of a deep Reality, the coming of God as a Force penetrating every aspect of a person's life. And, just as water in the desert was life-giving for the wandering Israelites, the *water* of a true, loving relationship with Jesus, received in the Sacrament of Baptism, is life-giving for us today.

We are assembled here in the Church to share in this *water* of eternal life and salvation. The Holy Spirit of God, the Word of God, and the Sacraments of God in the Church are the primary sources for the *living water* of Divine Grace. Washed clean in the water of Baptism, renewed by an abundance of grace at each Eucharist, inspired by the proclamation of the Word, and daily empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are challenged by today's Gospel to remain thirsty for, to long for, the *living water* which only God can give.

This gospel about the Samaritan woman is exceptionally rich. Every time we read it, we are passionately moved by the intense

dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. The Holy Father, Pope emeritus, Benedict XVI, recalling the great teaching of Saint Augustine, with regard to Christ's request to the woman, "give me something to drink", said: "Yes, God thirsts for our faith and our love. As a good and merciful father, he wants our total, possible good, and this good is he himself. The Samaritan woman, on the other hand, represents the existential dissatisfaction of one who does not find what he seeks. She had "five husbands" and now she lives with another man; her going to and from the well to draw water expresses a repetitive and resigned life. However, everything changes for her that day, thanks to the conversation with the Lord Jesus....." (Benedict XVI, 2008).

The living water, the gift of the Holy Spirit, can only be given by Jesus whom the Father sent into the world to give eternal life to all humanity, that is, never ending happiness. As the Pope Benedict reminds us "only the water that Jesus offers, the living water of the Spirit, can quench" man's "thirst for the infinite" (Benedict XVI, 2008). Man, as a mere creature, is able to give his fellow humans, affection, money, power, human glory, honor, career ... but not endless happiness which, since it is an unlimited good, belongs to the divine, infinite sphere of God!

The living water flows only from the divine source. The Samaritan woman went to a well which was deep, but limited, whereas her thirst for happiness and love was unlimited. The woman “represents the existential dissatisfaction of one who does not find what he seeks”. (Pope Benedict XVI). How often man seeks the infinite, the eternal, well-being...but sadly continues to seek it in a limited human-made well, an earthly reality, which is unable to satisfy man’s thirst for God. How many wells are deep but empty? How many wells we have encountered in our lives that are full of stagnant water? We carry within us immense desires and yet we easily deceive ourselves into thinking that we can fulfill these desires ourselves, without God.

On our own path of conversion, we are blessed to discover that the Lord Jesus waits patiently for us beside our senseless wells. When, like the woman at the well, we are tired of the things of this world, then the Divine Master is especially close to us. He asks us to give him something to drink, he asks us to trust Him to satisfy our heart. And, if we trust in Him, we discover the joy of finding the true well, the source of crystal-clear, everlasting, water.

The secret of happiness is to invert the process of selfishness: to forget self in order to make room for Another Person, the Lord of life

and happiness. Give up self and find God! If I renounce sin, I find grace, if I renounce myself, I find God and my brothers and sisters.

Lent is a time for all of us to scrutinize our lives. Lent is a time of fasting, prayer, and reconciling ourselves with God. So often we lie to ourselves and to each other. We don't want to look into that mirror and see our shortcomings. I know that I don't. At first glance everything is just fine but looking a little closer I see how I really look. Just like the woman at the well, we're all looking for something. We live in a real and spiritual desert.

We are all looking for something that will quench our thirst. Christ said, "Whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." During this Lenten season take advantage of the sacrament of reconciliation to cleanse yourself of your sins. Like the woman at the well who had failed so many times but kept searching, we too can start anew. We all say, "I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Christ; when he comes, he will tell us everything." Just like Jesus said to the woman, he says to us, "I am he, the one speaking with you."