

WATER'S POWER: QUENCHING OUR SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL THIRSTS



I was running through the streets of a foreign country, near my hotel, following familiar landmarks as my guide, when I got turned around, disoriented, hopelessly lost. The day was warm and thick. I was really really thirsty.

In Sunday's reading, Jesus and his disciples weren't lost but after a long journey they were tired. Jesus was thirsty.

Water, through the sacrament of baptism, sustains our spiritual life. Water, as a commodity, sustains life. 1.1 billion people do not have access to safe water. Every 15 seconds a child dies from a water-related disease.

Yet we divert valuable water to irrigate green lawns in areas that are naturally deserts, such as Dubai and Phoenix. Federal subsidies have paid to divert water to naturally dry areas of California to grow water-intensive crops.

In my parish, baptism is bestowed during mass. I never drift off. My gaze is never diverted. I am completely in awe of the sacrament of baptism (and I adore watching the glee of the newly-born infant). The power of water that quenches our spiritual thirst and our physical thirst.

We are all children of God. Not just us Catholics. All of us. Therefore we are all brothers and sisters. Solidarity, one of the principle themes of Catholic social teaching, embraces the oneness of this "human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be."

Jesus preached solidarity and lived solidarity. In Matthew he says "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:35-40). And Jesus stood with the poor. He touched the unclean lepers; He dined with tax collectors and prostitutes. Jesus did not just practice solidarity; he was in solidarity.

When we waste water, fail to conserve water, use far more than our fair share of water when others die of thirst or a disease caught from their polluted water, when all this happens we are not living in solidarity with our brothers and sisters; we violate the teachings of our church.

In Exodus the scarcity of water and the increasing thirst and rising tempers of the Israelites provides the background to Moses' fear and doubt of God's benevolence. In John Jesus does not discount the importance of water—after all, he does ask for a drink to quench his thirst—but he also points out the need to quench one's spiritual thirst through him—via the Holy Spirit.

The Great Moral Law is not how we do on the great checklist of do's and don'ts, rights and wrongs. The Great Moral Law is whether or not we live in Christ and invite Christ to live within us. What does this mean? In John, Jesus converses with a woman, a Samaritan. This would be doubly frowned upon in Jesus' time: women were inferior to men, Jews viewed Samaritans as anathema. When Jesus instructed the woman that to worship the Father she must also worship in Spirit and truth, he used not just words. By talking with a woman, a Samaritan he showed by example.

To live in Christ, then, is to converse with those whom society generally ignores or frowns upon. To live in Christ is more than treating everyone as their equal; it is recognizing that everyone truly is their equal. To live in Christ is to live in solidarity with all our brothers and sisters. And give them water.

When I was lost and thirsty during my run in another country I found no one who spoke English, no one to help me. Then during my fourth attempt to find help—directions—a bystander, who did not speak English, understood my dilemma and stepped in. A man of ingenuity he found the Chinese address to my hotel by calling an operator and gave this address to a cab driver.

This man who did not speak English saw another man in need, and stopped to help.

(Sunday readings from March 27, 2011)



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