

“The Holy Spirit says: Oh, that today you would hear his voice, ‘Harden not your hearts as at the rebellion in the day of testing in the desert, where your ancestors tested and tried me and saw my works’” (Heb 3:7-9). The Holy Spirit is quoting from Psalm 95 and referring to the hardened hearts of the Israelites who grumbled in the desert and put their Lord to the test.

Moses was at a breaking point. He felt the Israelites were ready to stone him to death. They used harsh words to complain about the difficulties and sacrifices of life as they traveled through the desert. They were hungry and so they complained. The Lord provided manna to meet their basic needs for sustenance. And they complained still. “In their thirst for water, the people grumbled against Moses, saying, ‘Why then did you bring us up out of Egypt? To have us die of thirst with our children and our livestock?’” (Ex 17:3). Moses cries out to the Lord for help and the Lord instructs him to go on ahead to the rock in Horeb striking it so that water will flow freely for the people to drink. “The place was named Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled there and tested the LORD, saying, ‘Is the LORD in our midst or not?’” (17:7). Translated, Massah means the “place of the test” and Meribah means “the place of strife, of quarreling.”

A New Testament counterpart to Moses striking the rock in Horeb is found in the passion and death of Jesus. With his Mother and the beloved disciple, John, looking on, Jesus cries out from the cross, “I thirst” (John 19:28).

Psalm 22 foretells of the agony on the cross: “As dry as a potsherd is my throat; my tongue cleaves to my palate; you lay me in the dust of death ... a pack of evildoers closes in on me. They have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. They stare at me and gloat; they divide my garments among them; for my clothing they cast lots” (16, 17b-19).

Jesus thirsts for more than a mere drink of water. Jesus knows that while he may be mocked by those who give him a bitter wine like vinegar to drink, that his Father in heaven hears his cry and responds with deliverance. “The poor will eat their fill; those who seek the LORD will offer praise. May your hearts enjoy life forever!” (27). And that through his passion, death, and resurrection, their will be deliverance for mankind. “All who sleep in the earth will bow low before God; All who have gone down into the dust will kneel in homage” (30).

And as water flowed forth from the rock at Horeb, we recall the death of Jesus when a soldier thrust a lance into his side. Jesus had already breathed his last and handed over his spirit. “Immediately blood and water flowed out” (Jn 19:34) from the side of Jesus. Blood and water offer symbolic references to the Eucharist and Baptism.

The Sacrifice of Good Friday is intimately connected with the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday. “Once supper was ended, Jesus took the chalice and, once more giving thanks he gave it to his disciples, saying: take this, all of you and drink from it, for this is the chalice of my blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in memory of me.”

So too with the symbolic water that flowed from the side of Jesus reminding us of the lifegiving waters of Baptism that set us free from sin. Let us recall the Samaritan woman at the well whom Jesus encounters. “For when he asked the Samaritan woman for water to drink, he had already created the gift of faith within her and so ardently did he thirst for her faith, that he kindled in her the fire of divine love” (Roman Missal, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent, p 238).

In their thirst, the Israelites hardened their hearts and grumbled. In the midst of our own difficulties, with the backdrop of the pandemic and the unrest in the Capitol, perhaps we have begun to grumble as well rather than thirst as the Samaritan woman did. Perhaps our anger has flared up, and we have taken it out on others. Perhaps our hearts have hardened, and we need to hear the counsel of the Lord through the Letter to the Hebrews. “Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil and unfaithful heart, so as to forsake the living God... We have become partners of Christ if only we hold the beginning of the reality firm until the end” (Heb 3:12, 14).

So, what is the proper response of our hearts to such a loving God who pours himself out for our salvation? At Mass we pray: “It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord. Amen.”