

3LentA 2019

Exodus 17:3-7

Romans 5:1-2,5-8

John 4:5-42

In 1999 the poet James Casey wrote a poem that took a phrase from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 1834 the Rime of the Ancient Mariner. That phrase is, "Water, water, everywhere, and not a drop to drink." Casey goes on to describe the sunrises on the ocean that show God is near without a single sound, the beauty of sunsets, the nights on the oceans, moonless skies that seem so cold and the beauty of twinklers on starry nights.

Of course, this water Casey was talking about could not be consumed because it was not simple water, not pure water. It was salt water.

Looking around our beautiful Springfield Township we see plenty of water we can drink. Spiritually we have important waters also, some of which are highlighted in today's beautiful Scripture passages. Drinking in the water of life in the Scriptures is life-changing, both the water the Scriptures describes and the water of the Scriptures.

Today's Scriptures give us reminders of what it is like to be without water and what water means in our Christian life.

The Israelites wandering in the desert after the Exodus grumbled when they lacked water. Their grumbling was almost eloquent as they indicate their willingness to return to slavery in Egypt rather than die of thirst in the desert. The Old Testament is full of stories of prosperity that use water as a symbol of bounty or a blessing from God and stories of woe would use a lack of water as a symbol of poverty, punishment, or some other negative connotation.

Even today, as we enter a Catholic church we remind ourselves of the beauty of water in our spiritual life and that we are home when we arrive by dipping our right hand into the Holy Water font and making the sign of the Cross to remind ourselves that we have been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And we do the same on our way out to remind ourselves that we are on mission to take our faith to the world, to fulfill our baptismal promises.

We have the privilege of hindsight knowing the rest of the story. We can reflect on the water of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan at the beginning of His public ministry and how He completed His redeeming act on the Cross with blood and water flowing from His side when the centurion pierced His side. For the Samaritan woman, she was to be guided by discourse and faith as she exchanged a quite pointed dialogue with the Lord.

We don't always appreciate the setting of this conversation. It simply was not a conversation that would have occurred in the society of the time. In fact, this woman was probably not intending to talk with anyone, not even to gossip since with her history of marriages and now living with a man outside of marriage, she was most likely the topic of others' gossip.

So, the setting is awkward at best. At the risk of offending someone, please bear with me. My intent is not to offend, stereotype or indicate any prejudice. But can you imagine a member of the KKK asking an African-American woman for a drink of water; or the same happening between a Taliban fighter and a Jewish woman today?

Jesus and the Samaritan woman go beyond the drink of water. Jesus allows her to drink in truth, forgiveness, discipleship, and living water. As Christian people we are called to be people of water, people of tears, people of repentance and forgiveness. Jesus gives her the invitation to RCIA, the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults – our preparation process for those seeking to enter the Church, the first lessons in water, and the inspiration to hope and faith. And that is what our three seekers come to do today, to take another step on their journey, two to the waters of Baptism, and one to the full communion with the Church.

There is a real beauty in the questions Jesus asks the Samaritan woman and the questions she asks Jesus. Each question, from Jesus asking for a drink of water, to the woman asking where Jesus' bucket is, to Jesus asking her to bring her husband to meet Him, to the woman asking where it is proper to worship, helps us see how to develop a deeper relationship with Jesus. We too need to converse with Jesus, both asking questions and listening to His questions of us. That is part of what we are called to do during Lent.

From the very early days of the Church, Christians set aside the season of Lent as a journey toward authenticity. We have lived close to redemption in our daily lives, hoping to experience the grace of water shimmering in the distance along our journey, rushing down, splashing, beading on our bodies. If we were to picture the Sacrament of Baptism as a painting, can we take the frame off that painting of Baptism and plunge deeply into the experience of the painting's waters?

We who can must be living examples that encourage people like our three friends here today to know that Baptism is the cascade we live, not several miles from, but beside and within. It is water from the rock of Christ, which is ours not because we know where to find it, not because we knew how to ask for it, but because God is God. It is the water which cleansed all the saints, gave them hope and a future.

Saint Paul puts the reading from the Book of Exodus and the Gospel of John in context when he says, "...hope does not disappoint." It is God's grace that gives the Israelites hope that the Promised Land would be theirs. It is God's hope that led the Samaritan woman to call her townspeople to come see because "He told me everything I have done."

Just as Jesus had a cryptic conversation with the Samaritan woman, He has a similar cryptic conversation with his disciples when they return regarding food. He is quite engaging as He explains the need to work together to accomplish the spread of the Kingdom, each fulfilling the role assigned and complimenting the roles of others. This is why we need each other today, and why we need these three who aspire to be one with us this coming Easter Vigil.

Here, in the Church, we can find water. We can find water everywhere. And we can drink from the well of salvation. For just a few more weeks we will journey through the desert of Lent. Yet each day, God offers us grace from the well to keep us hydrated until we see the flood gates opened as we celebrate Easter. Then we will again celebrate water, water everywhere for all of us to drink!