

Homily Notes for Sunday, March 15, 2020, Lent 3 A For What Are You Thirsty?

Readings: Ex 17:3-7; Ps 95:1-9; Rom 5:1-2, 5-8; Jn 4:5-42.

1. Summary: During Lent, cycle A, we touch on the most basic themes of being Christian. The most basic of these is faith in Jesus. Personal faith and a relationship with Jesus Christ satisfy the most basic of our thirsts.

Scripture lessons summarized:

2. The first reading describes how God provided water to the ungrateful complainers of Israel, thus placing Jesus' promise within the context of the Exodus account of water coming from the rock at Horeb. Let us note here that God promises to take care of our most basic physical needs. Jesus himself tells us not to be anxious but to trust in God (Matt 6:25-34). How hard it is to have the right attitude to allow this to happen!

3. The Responsorial Psalm (Ps 95), refers both to the *Rock of our salvation* and also to our hardened hearts. It reminds us that our hard hearts need to be softened by God through the spiritual disciplines of Lent: *prayer, fasting and works of mercy* which enable us to be more receptive to the *living water* of the Holy Spirit for our salvation. These we really need to have so that our basic as well as spiritual needs can be supplied.

4. In the second reading, Saint Paul asserts that, as the Savior of mankind, Jesus died for us, saving us from the wrath of God. It is that separation from God that leads to our problems.

5. In the Gospel, we have a great example of using a situation of physical need to communicate profound spiritual truth. Here we see a shift from a literal, physical thirst for water to a spiritual awareness of the power of God to satisfy the deepest desires of the human heart.

Jesus first comes to the well, expressing to the woman (who has the bucket) that he is thirsty. She argues with him about their differences. But in his response, by saying, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." This is a play on words, for "living water" also described water in a flowing stream.

Then Jesus took the image deeper by saying, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but 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.

She thinks this would be literally a good deal, not being thirsty again nor having to come there to do the hard work of drawing water.

Then Jesus took the discussion to a moral and spiritual level, speaking of the multiple husbands she had had, but also criticizing the errors of the Samaritans. This took the discussion to the level of what is true worship and where it should be carried out.

Finally, he said that "The hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth. That is what we now do as Catholic Christians. This Gospel passage also gives us Jesus' revelation about himself as the

Source of *Living Water* and teaches us that we need the grace of Jesus Christ for eternal life because he is that *life-giving water*. The woman then understands that he is the Messiah and goes to give testimony to Him.

Let us notice that the Samaritans were looking for the chosen one of God, the Messiah. They learned Jesus was the one from the testimony of the woman.

6. For what are people thirsting today? Don't people want happiness, meaning in life, peace, stability, security, love, commitment, absence of guilt, being right with God? Is it not true that we need to be close to Jesus to obtain these things? Do we, as active Catholics, not have that which people most want? Are we prepared to share what we have, if we have it? St Augustine once said, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our **heart** is **restless** until it finds its rest in You." Let me share a story.

7. A Protestant pastor shared this about a member of his congregation who had come from another country. He said of her, "Her faith sparkled and the living water of the Spirit flowed out of her soul to all around her." He invited her to go with him to a seminar on the topic of evangelization. The leaders there had tables filled with pamphlets and studies aimed at reaching the unchurched in their area. During the seminar the leaders turned to the woman and asked her to share some of the reasons that made the church so important and so vital in her home country. She said,

"We never gave pamphlets to people because we never had any."

"We just showed people by our life and example what it is like to be a Christian and when they can see for themselves, then they want to be a Christian, too."

8. Isn't that the bottom line? After her encounter with Jesus, the Samaritan woman became an effective Christian witness. Is the way we live our lives as Christians like that? This has particular importance for us at this time of anxiety and insecurity because of this coronavirus. This certainly is a very important time for us to show patience and compassion with others. It is a time to make sacrifices for others and to think of others before ourselves. I am certain that everything is going to work out for the best in the long run, but we need to be particularly conscious of our actions and our witness among the general population, that we might show forth the love of Jesus!

Is it not true that we have really been blessed, both in material goods and spiritually in our faith? Don't we have a valuable testimony to give?

9. What kind of testimony do you think people most want to see from us as Christians? How can we be prepared to give such a testimony? What would be the next step for us?