

Homily for the 3rd Sunday of Lent

You may have picked up on the fact that today's readings have a lot to do with the theme of water. The first reading speaks about Moses being instructed by God to hit the rock in the desert with his staff so that they people could have water to drink. And the Gospel according to John tells of Jesus' encounter with this certain Samaritan woman at the well. And there's just so much going in this passage that I want to focus on it now. St. John tells us that Jesus was sitting at a well, tired from His journey with His disciples to Samaria. Well (pun intended!), along comes this woman, and Jesus asks her for a drink. Now, as far as a Jewish man asking a Samaritan woman for a drink in public – using the same bucket – a huge no-no! But pretty soon, Jesus' true humility gets this woman's attention, and before long a conversation about water unfolds as He answers her objection about sharing the same drinking vessel. Jesus says, "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." Living water is an interesting phrase in the original Greek that John wrote in. The Greek word is 'zoe' – spelled just like the girl's name, Zoe, which literally means "life". We get our English word "zoo" from this Greek word. The zoo is where we go to see all these forms of animal life.

Well, like many words, ‘zoe’ has multiple meanings. It means living or alive. But, by extension, it also means flowing, when referring to water. In other words, flowing water is alive. The Samaritan woman understands the living water Jesus talking about as the second type – flowing water. And this makes absolutely no sense to her because water from a well isn’t flowing – it’s stagnant! She even says to Jesus, “Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep; where then can you get this *living* water?”

Jesus, though, isn’t interested in talking with her about which type of water is better – either well water or flowing water, say from a stream. Rather, He wants to take the conversation with her to the next level to talk about the other meaning of water, **living** water – water that gives life. And so Jesus says to her, “Everyone who drinks this water [from the well] will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst.” Now, fully enticed and open to Jesus’ offer, the woman asks for the living water that Jesus can give her.

What is this water that only Jesus can give? Well, in the Gospel of John, Jesus Himself tells us – the Holy Spirit. Think about it – water is life. We can live without food and shelter for days, even weeks – but without water after a day or so, life is impossible. We need water to live. The Samaritan woman knew this – that’s why she was at the well in the first place. But by inviting her to receive this living water that Jesus is offering, He is addressing her deeper thirst – her spiritual thirst for the living God.

Putting this all in plain language, we cannot live without the Holy Spirit. Why? Because God's Spirit, dwelling within us, **is** life! On the day of our baptism, each one of us received this living water. We were washed clean of all of our sins by the power of the Holy Spirit. We were born again as adopted sons and daughters of God the Father. And we were given to drink of the springs of eternal life, so that we could be saved from eternal separation from God.

But that was then. This is now – for some of us, many more years later than others! Can you imagine if you only had one big drink of water 20 or more years ago, and never since? Well no, you can't, because you'd be dead! Well, something similar happens when we try to live our lives apart from the Holy Spirit too. Spiritually, we become these shriveled up, barely hanging on, spiritually-malnourished people!

The Holy Spirit is the power of God given to us so that we can live in fellowship with God. We need the Holy Spirit each and every day if we are going to overcome our sins. We need the Holy Spirit at every moment that temptation strikes if we are not going to succumb. We need the Holy Spirit desperately if we are going to be able to live the lives God commands us to live.

Therefore, we constantly need to go to God, and ask Him to fill us with His Spirit. I do this all throughout the day. “Lord, I don’t have what it takes. Fill me with your Spirit. Fill me up!” And when His Spirit fills our spirits, then we are empowered to live as God created us to be. It is God living and working in us. We are just cooperating with Him and believing that He really will do so!

My brothers and sisters, Lent is a time of journeying with Jesus into the desert of our lives. It’s a time of recognizing our need to utterly depend on Him. Without Jesus we have no life and are dead in our sins. So, allow yourself to recognize your deep spiritual thirst – a thirst every human being possesses – and then allow God to quench your thirst. He will never leave you thirsty because, as Jesus says, “whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst...[rather, it] will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” God bless you.