

### 3rd Sunday of Lent cycle A

Water is one of the great symbols of faith in the Scriptures. When the Israelites were thirsting for water in the desert, it became a test of faith in God; at Massah, they got the water they desired from a rock of all things, but in the process they tested God and in doing that, showed a great lack of faith. They never did ask God for water; they just kept complaining to Moses about the lack of it. Jacob's well, where today's Gospel took place, was also a place of faith, a place revered by Jacob's descendants as where God showed favor to Jacob by drawing him to his beloved Rachel, and extending his family. When a child is baptized, his parents will be asked at the beginning of the ritual, "What do you ask of God's Church?" And the interchangeable answers are "baptism" and "faith," because baptism, which by necessity must involve the pouring of water, is intrinsically an act of faith.

And so, on this third Sunday of Lent, we come to the woman at the well. Jesus says to her when he encounters her "give me a drink." She protests—can't believe that he would even ask, tries to give him a little lesson in Jewish/Samaritan relations. But Jesus, in response, turns around and offers her not only a drink, but a better drink: if you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you "give me a drink," he said, "you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." This is the progression, the development, of faith in each one of us. Jesus makes the first move, comes to us and asks us for something very little: as little as a small drink of water from the dirty, brackish waters of an old, stale well. What he asks of us is so little in the bigger picture: obedience, some self-denial, charity, belief in him. It pales in comparison to what he wants to give us: living water. The living water of which he speaks is his revelation, that he is the Christ who came to save us; to drink of this living water is to place our trust in him, in his revelation, in his mission, in his plan for us, and in his cross for us. He offers us more than we can comprehend; we are so like the woman at the well, who when Jesus offers her living waters immediately thinks "hmm, flowing water," water which tastes better and is cleaner and more pure than the water from this well; water from a supply which will never end. She can't even imagine yet the totally of what he wants to give her.

Look at how this woman is challenged repeatedly by Jesus. First, he asks for water; she rebukes him; then he offers her living water. She questions how he can draw that kind of water out of that well; he offers her water which will not only be better than that of Jacob's well, but which will quench her thirst forever. Then the business with her husbands, and then a challenge of faith, over where is the place to worship. And with each challenge, the woman, far from turning away offended at what Jesus says to her, grows in acceptance of what he says. She meets Jesus, recognizes him as a Jewish man, then recognizes him as a teacher, then declares "I can see you are a prophet." And by the time she relates the story to others she understands that he is the Christ. In a similar way, faith challenges us. Faith sometimes rebukes our decisions, our life's

outlook; it asks us to change, to deny ourselves, to atone for past mistakes. And if we will grow in our faith, we too will come to see more and more this man Jesus as still a Jewish man who lived two thousand years ago, yet also the ultimate teacher, and also the ultimate prophet, and also the Christ, the anointed of God, who has come to give us water which will become in us a spring welling up to eternal life.

In the desert, the Israelites had an experience unlike that of the woman at the well. By challenging Moses they challenged God, but they had no real trust; they would not themselves be challenged, but kept going back to the mindset that the slavery of Egypt was better than the self-denial in the desert which would gain them the promised land. They tested the Lord, saying “is the Lord in our midst, or not?” Imagine, delivering a people from slavery with such mighty signs and wonders as they saw, making your presence known night and day in a column of cloud and a pillar of fire, and then having them say “is he in our midst, our not?” And yet, it is a question that many people, including people of great faith, sometimes ask; because we just don’t know. We don’t experience God’s presence the way we do each other’s presence; we interact with God on a level which is above our capabilities. And that is why faith is what drives us in this relationship with God. Paul wrote to the Romans: “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith to this grace in which we stand.” Our encounter with God becomes evident in the peace we experience and in the hope we feel. We know that God proves his love for us not by giving us every little thing that we ask for, not by giving us lives of ease and comfort and security; he showed his love for us by giving us his Son on the cross. We ask for so little at times: the equivalent of the brackish, dirty water in an old well, and we become so sold on it that we fail to ask for the living water. If you knew who is saying to you “give me a drink.” Do we know? First of all, know that “give me a drink” will come out in a lot of other forms. Jesus is saying to us “give me some mercy, by forgiving that person who wronged you and now asks for your forgiveness.” “Give me some compassion, by showing just a little bit of kindness to that person in need.” “Give me a little bit of self-denial, by not having the steak tonight, but settling for macaroni and cheese instead.” “Give me some obedience, by turning off the computer and staying off that web site, or by turning off that movie that you would never watch if I was sitting in the room with you.” Give me a drink. And if we know who it is who is asking for these small little gestures, we will say “and give me even more in return. Give me the living water. Give me a share in your life.” We then will recognize the man, learn from the teacher, heed the words of the prophet, and worship the Christ.

The Samaritan woman, her encounter with Jesus abruptly ended by the appearance of the disciples, leaves her water jar behind. To fill the water jar was the very reason why she went to the well in the first place; she thought that filling the water jar was what it was all about. That was before she encountered Jesus. So many people keep thinking that this life is about making money, having fun, gaining power, experiencing all that there is to experience; gaining the dirty, scummy

water from the well: it's what we've always done, it's all that we've ever known. And so many people *settle* for hatred in their hearts, unchastity in their minds and in their bodies, greed in their souls, violence in their actions; it's what we came to the well for, no? No, it's not. Did Jacob give the well its significance? Maybe at one time; but the reason we heard about Jacob's well is not because of Jacob's encounter there, but because of Jesus' encounter there. And the woman never did draw her water from it; she let it become the springboard to a life of faith. She left the water jug behind, because she didn't need it anymore; after this, she would settle for nothing less than those living waters Jesus promised. Are we ready to leave our water jars behind? Are we ready to let go of this world's passing goods, let go of the empty promises of the Tempter, let go of our sins, let go of all the hatred and anger and pettiness which will have no place in heaven? Are we ready to invest in this place of eternal peace and happiness, sight unseen, description unheard, reality unimaginable to us in this finite state? Are we ready to leave this world's wells, and place all our stock in the living waters? We should be because we've come to recognize this man Jesus as the Christ. The Samaritans of that town began to believe in him because of his word. We not only have heard his word, but here we have the opportunity to worship him in the Eucharist, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. This is the Savior of the world, our Savior, for each one of us. Offer him the little token drinks of water which come from faith; know that he, who is the Christ, is prepared to quench an eternal thirst within us. Don't worry about the water jars, about this world's delights and treasures and fleeting pleasures. We won't need those, if after hearing his voice, we recognize the Savior, and put all our trust and hope in him.

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