

### 3rd SUNDAY OF LENT - YEAR A SCRIPTURE READINGS

Exodus 17:3-7 - "But the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses..."

Romans 5:1-2, 5-8 - "...God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us..."

John 4:5-42 - "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty..."

#### INTRODUCTION

Welcome to all today, as we enter the third week of Lent this Sunday. In today's readings, we encounter a couple of stories that feature the symbol of water. Water is a symbol of life, and it indicates that God wishes to give us life, as shown in the stories of the Israelites in the desert and the Samaritan woman at the well. In the gospel, Jesus assures us that he will give us the 'living water' that we may never thirst again. There are many scriptural passages that reference this symbol, which is a attribute to the power of the Holy Spirit. This Lenten season offers us a wonderful opportunity for that grace of Jesus. Through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, we can draw closer to the heart of Jesus by encountering him, listening to him, and being filled and satisfied by the 'living water'. Let us look beyond the immediate necessity of water and strive to receive the gift of 'living water' that Jesus offers to each of us especially the Holy Spirit, 'the spring of water welling up to eternal life'.

#### OCIA

The Scrutinies are Rites celebrated on the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent, by those people (catechumenates) who are preparing to be baptized at Easter, known as "The Elect". The Rite of handing on the Creed takes place this (third) Sunday following the first scrutiny (OCIA 157-163).

#### HOMILY

*(Extracted and edited, meditated and added by Fr.Hrudaya Gade)*

**Theme:** "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty..."

**Point of Focus:** Pastoral Care - Giving the thirst-quenching water for the dying People and offering the Living Water for unquenched Persons

#### The Gospel Story Today

As we continue our Lenten journey, today's gospel presents the remarkable moment when our Lord encounters and converses with the Samaritan Woman at the well. This extraordinary meeting and dialogue highlight that Jesus desires to satisfy our ultimate thirst for salvation. There are many other wonderful facets to this story, but today, let us concentrate on Jesus, who promises to provide the Samaritan woman with the Eternal "Living Water".

#### Understanding Pastoral Care

What does it mean to be 'pastoral'? I am a priest who has served as the pastor in numerous parishes across the world for about thirty years. I hold a Master's degree in 'Pastoral Theology' from the University of London. Still, this degree doesn't guarantee that my ministry will get better because Pastoral Theology is a practical branch of theology. Pastoral theology is not about preaching or moral policing. Those engaged in pastoral care—be they priests, deacons, religious or laypersons—are not life coaches or

motivators. The term 'pastoral' originates from the Latin word 'pastor,' which translates to 'shepherd,' and it signifies the shepherd's dedication and concern for his flock. 'Pastoral care' is rooted in the shepherd's image of leadership, which involves providing the sacraments for the salvation of the souls, caring for the sick, the weak, and the needy, as well as accompanying, nurturing, and guiding individuals, particularly during challenging times or periods of searching. At its core, being pastoral is the fundamental element of Christian ministry. A 'pastoral approach' implies gentleness, patience, and a significant amount of listening. In 'pastoral counseling,' it is assumed that beneath psychological distress may lie deeper issues: guilt, a lack of meaning, loneliness, or spiritual dryness or modern day moral confusions. Pastoral care also includes the Church's outreach beyond its walls: its efforts to assist the poor, advocate for justice, and engage with social suffering. In my view, from what I've learned and experienced, being pastoral means knowing how to read the room like an educationist, diagnose the root causes of issues like a doctor, read between the lines like a scholar, recognize the signs of the times like a prophet, analyze the weather like a scientist, and exit what we call spiritual wisdom like a priest and offer to individuals the good news of salvation like Christ...

### **Pastoral Sensitivity of Jesus**

In today's gospel, Jesus is portrayed as the epitome of pastoral care. In all his words, actions, attitudes, and suggestions, he demonstrates remarkable pastoral care. He prioritizes the individual over legalism and love over the law. Jesus uplifts women over men, honesty over hatred, truth over deceit, goodness over prejudice, and unity over division. Jesus stops in a Samaritan town, despite the long-standing animosity between Jews and Samaritans that has lasted over 500 years. He then requests a drink from a woman, which is a violation of the law. It was viewed as unacceptable for a man, particularly a rabbi, to speak with a woman in private, and even more so to converse with a Samaritan and even more more so to drink from her cup, which would make him ritually impure. The woman herself wonders how a Jew could ask a Samaritan for water. Jesus responds, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." In this moment, Jesus highlights the spiritual need of every person. He indicates that the spiritual gift of God is what truly matters and most valuable. Jesus is essentially attempting to save anyone from spiritual thirst with the living water, similar to how the Israelites cried out to God to give them water in the desert.

#### **"The Living Water"**

In the biblical context, the term "living water" usually denotes "water of life." In the Old Testament, water serves as a frequent metaphor for spiritual fulfillment (Is 12, 3). It also signifies Divine Spirit and wisdom [Jer 2:13; Zech 14:8; Ezek 47:9; Prov 13:14, etc.]. In the gospel's narrative, when Jesus offered the Samaritan woman living water, he was referring to a water unlike that of Jacob's well. Samaritan woman likely perceived "living water" as flowing (stream) water, in contrast to the stagnant water from a well or cistern. Nevertheless, scholars have engaged in discussions regarding the precise meaning of Jesus' mention of living water. Raymond E. Brown has pointed out that there are two interpretations: living water can mean the revelation or teaching that Jesus came to deliver, and it can also refer to the Holy Spirit that Jesus gives (The Gospel According to John, Anchor Bible, Vol. 29, Doubleday, New York: 1966).

The living water is an invaluable and everlasting gift that can only stem from God, the source of all life. Today's Second Reading [Rom 5:1-2, 5-8] tells us that God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, which has been bestowed upon us through Christ. Because God desires to grant us life, true life, and He wants us to truly live. The Holy Spirit not only flows but also acts as a spring, perpetually bubbling up. This is a tremendous blessing for us. Eventually, this living water that Jesus offers will become in us 'a spring of water welling up to eternal life'! All we need to do is ask, 'Jesus, my savior, please give me that water.'

### **Reflect**

#### **Modern attitude towards Prayer and the Necessity to examine our Priorities**

The reason we often live without experiencing the effects of living water (which we received from Baptism) in our lives is due to how we have failed to ask for it or failed to accept it. The first reading (Exodus 17:3-7) illustrates a typical modern-day attitude towards prayer. The people, tormented by thirst, complained to Moses, asking, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, only to let us and our children and cattle die of thirst?" Our fast-paced technological culture has conditioned us to expect everything to be 'instant.' We even raise our voices at fast-food workers for not being quick enough! We desire our prayer services to be short. Our preoccupation with a fast-paced lifestyle often leads us to miss the miracles and wonders God performs in our lives, as we remain so busy. Economic demands exert immense pressure on us to channel our energy solely into career advancement and fulfilling family obligations. As a result, we devote ourselves entirely to these priorities, becoming desensitized to deeper needs, blind to spiritual necessities, and indifferent to the needs of those around us.

Let me share a story with you. There was a striking photographer Journalist Kevin Carter who captured global attention. In 1993, Carter received an assignment in Sudan. The country was devastated by drought and civil war, yet the story received minimal media coverage. Carter aimed to highlight the humanitarian crisis. An impactful photograph of Journalist Kevin Carter seized the world's attention - a frail child lying on the ground, with a vulture ominously lurking in the background. Carter's photo, published in March 1993, stunned the world. Although some viewed the picture as exploitative, it successfully generated donations for relief aid.

Carter was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for the best picture of the year. He explained how he took the photograph. The camp was overcrowded, with thousands of starving individuals arriving for food at the feeding center. Carter was wandering outside the camp when he spotted a tiny girl crouched down, her head bowed, struggling to reach the feeding center. He quickly prepared his camera, recognizing the moment's significance. Just as he began to photograph her, a vulture, taller than the child, landed just a feet away behind her, waiting to claim her once she succumbed to death. For about 30 minutes, Kevin was waiting for the right lighting and for the bird to open its wings, hoping the vulture would do something like spread its wings for a more impactful image. But nothing happened. After capturing the photos, he drove the vulture away and observed as the child struggled towards the camp.

Shortly thereafter, a storm of criticism arose regarding his insensitivity to human suffering. Carter was harshly criticized for being so focused on his craft that he did not drop everything to rush the child to the feeding center. Why did he wait so long when a child's life was at stake? Three months after receiving the Pulitzer Prize, Carter ended

his own life by suicide. He had failed to recognize the child as a life in need of rescue; instead, he viewed it merely as a subject for a photograph. His obsession with his work was unwavering, and nothing took precedence over his photography. He once stated, "Photography is my life." Kevin Carter was addicted to his photography, and it ultimately cost him his life.

We know anyone would act like Kevin Carter. We have the stories of "culture of selfies" shared in the social media that has been killing numerous young people... Now, we could all ask ourselves a question, what controls my life? Is it lust for power, for recognition, for honor and glory? What are you thirsting or hungering for? My friends, Lent is designed precisely as a time for us to wake up and examine our priorities. Today's gospel story tells us we, too, might be struggling with disordered loves/ disordered desires/disordered priorities in our lives. May be we too need some conversing moments with Jesus and seek His help...

### **Prayer of Reflection**

This is a prayer of reflection. It was composed by an anonymous individual who was inspired by the narrative of the Samaritan woman, who craved for more than just water. It encourages us to imagine ourselves in the Samaritan woman's position to uncover valuable insights for our lives:

*"My brothers and sisters,  
There is a thirst in every human heart.  
Each of us is like that lonely Samaritan woman.  
We are thirsting for something,  
something that will satisfy all our longings.  
But often we search in the wrong places.  
We draw the water from many wells:  
the water of praise to quench our thirst for self-esteem;  
the water of success to quench our thirst for importance;  
the water of pleasure to quench our thirst for joy.  
And, yet, we still remain thirsty.  
For only God can give us what we are looking for.  
God alone can cause a spring to well up inside us  
and the water from this spring will sustain us in our journey  
to the Promised Land of everlasting life."*

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **Prayer of St Anselm of Canterbury (1033 - 1109)**

O Lord my God,  
teach my heart this day where and how to see you, where and how to find you.  
You have made me and remade me.  
You have bestowed on me all the good things I possess. Still, I do not know you.  
I have not yet done that for which I was made.  
Teach me to seek you, for I cannot seek you unless you teach me,  
or find you unless you show yourself to me.  
Let me seek you in my desire.  
Let me desire you in my seeking.  
Let me find you by loving you.  
Let me love you when I find you. AMEN.