

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent (Year A)

*Exodus 17:3-7*

*Romans 5:1-2, 5-8*

*John 4:5-42*

**“MY SOUL THIRSTS FOR GOD, THE LIVING GOD!”**

*It is said that some years ago a vessel sailing on the northern coast of the South American continent was observed to make signals of distress. When hailed by another vessel, they reported themselves as “Dying for water!”*

*“Dip it up then,” was the response. “You are in the mouth of Amazon river.”*

*There was fresh water all around them, and they had nothing to do but to dip it up, and yet they were dying of thirst because they thought themselves surrounded by sea water.*

People are often ignorant of God and without His Word. How sad that they should perish for lack of knowledge.

**We** are in the Holy Season of Lent and today is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday. The dominant image in today’s Scripture Readings is *‘water’* and there is an obvious link with baptism. However, there is richness in the three readings that is much broader than theme for baptism. In fact, the particular focus on today’s readings has to do with our understanding of faith as God’s gift. In the First Reading from the Book of Exodus, the Israelite people tormented by thirst in the wilderness are crying out for water. In the face of their mistrust, Moses believes in God’s power to save; in the face of their grumbling, he lifts his hands in prayer; in answer to their testing, he proves God’s presence by striking the rock to bring forth water. In the Gospel Reading from St. John, we have the marvelous account of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. Jesus is tired and thirsty from his journey and asks her for a drink. But his real thirst is for this woman’s faith and salvation. He invites her to come to faith in him and she finally recognizes him as the Messiah, the Savior of the world. St. Paul, in the Second Reading from his Letter to the Romans tells us that faith, hope and love are God’s gifts to us. We are all God’s chosen people called upon to live purified lives and God’s love was poured into our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit that has been given to us through Christ. Thus today’s readings are directing us to take a good look into ourselves and experience the divine insight.

### LIVING WATER FROM THE ROCK:

The First Reading of today from the Book of Exodus tells us that God provided the Israelite people with *'living water from the rock.'* God has rescued them from Egypt and the grip of the Pharaoh, but because they have been traveling in a desert, they are very much in need of water and are dying of thirst. It was actually one of the three events found in the Old Testament that speak of people thirsting for water. Here once again people exhibit spiritual weakness and grumble against God and Moses. This base need for water makes them question God's hand in all this. This all takes place at a place called Massah, which means *'a time of testing'* and Meribah, which means *'dissatisfaction.'* God displays great patience both with Moses and His people. Moses, who is the leader and caretaker of the people and who always acted upon God's direction and aid, goes to God for help again. Using the very staff he used when he led his people out of Egypt and opened the Red Sea for them, Moses strikes a rock and water pours out. Once again everyone has the evidence that God is in their midst.

In view of the above events, Moses became a type of Christ, both providing water to the people.

### JESUS AND THE SAMARITAN WOMAN AT THE WELL:

Today's Gospel Reading from St. John echoes the First Reading from the Book of Exodus concerning the living water and tells us how God communicates His Divine life to believers. Jesus promised the unnamed Samaritan woman the living water that will become a spring of water gushing up to eternal life and the grace to recognize who he really is. It was not a coincidence that the gospel story tells of the Samaritan woman meeting Jesus at a well. Wells were sources of water but they were also meeting places. People used to go there to do business, to catch up on gossip, even to meet their future partners.

#### a) *"Give me a drink."*

The story of the meeting of Jesus and the woman at the well started with a simple request from Jesus, **"Give me a drink."** It was noontime. Jesus was thirsty. He came to a well near a Samaritan town and stopped to rest. Then a woman of that Samaritan

town came to the well. She had come out in the middle of the day to get water to drink. Now, the polite thing to do was to ignore one another. After all Jews and Samaritans weren't supposed to mix and men were not supposed to address women in public, and one doesn't get more public than the village well. But Jesus spoke to the woman, in public! He was thirsty but had no means of reaching the water. She however had a bucket and a rope and could reach the water. So, he asked her for a drink of water. This was socially unacceptable and the Samaritan woman had to remind Jesus about this. But Jesus reached across the barriers of racial and religious prejudice. He reached across the barriers of sexism. He reached across the barriers of shame and guilt. He reached across the barriers between good and bad. And he asked her for a drink of water. It was a hot day and he and the disciples had been walking since sunup. He surely needed water for his parched throat. But Jesus had a deeper thirst - his real thirst was for this woman's faith and salvation.

***b) "Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty."***

**L**ike Jesus the Samaritan woman was thirsty too. That's why she came to draw water from the well. But in reality her thirst was more than water and Jesus could see that. She needed some peace from the turmoil and chaos of emotions and relationships in which she lived. She needed forgiveness and release of the shame that she lived in. She needed the love that she so desperately sought but failed to find five times. She needed someone she could trust and believe in. She needed a Savior; a Messiah!

As they talked Jesus revealed that he knew her thirst. Their dialogue progressed from a simple request for a drink to discussion about living water. Living water ordinarily meant water that flows from a spring rather than stagnant water from a well. However in their discussion it came to mean the water of eternal life. The woman's knowledge of Jesus also progressed, from a mere stranger who is a Jew, to a Prophet, to a Messiah and Savior.

She thirsted for a genuine relationship. Even among the outcast Samaritans she was an outsider. She was a woman with a bad reputation. Everyone knew her past. She had had five husbands and was living with a man in sin. This was in a day when only men could divorce. She had been used and discarded again and again.

She also thirsted for God. Once she realized that Jesus was more than just another Jew she asked him a question. The question basically amounted to *'Where do I find God?'* This is to be kept in mind that the Samaritans had descended from Jews who had abandoned worshipping in Jerusalem and would sacrifice in the hill shrines. The Jews however sacrificed only in Jerusalem.

She was thirsty, so she requested Jesus saying, **“Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty again,”** and Jesus offered her living water, the water of eternal life! She was thirsty for a real relationship and for God. Jesus had a never ending supply of what she needed. So he offered her both. He let her know that he knew her and still cared. He was honest with her even when it was not pleasant. And he told her that, while the Jews had it right about where to sacrifice, in the long run what matters is not where you worship but where your heart is. What really matters is not the geography but that one worships in spirit and in truth.

***c) “We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”***

**T**here were also a lot more thirsty people in that village. The Samaritan woman did realize this. As soon as she knew who Jesus was, she ran to the town to tell others. The amazing thing is that these are the very people who had shunned her and abused her. Some of them may have been her ex-husbands and men she had been in illicit relationships with. Yet, she ran right to these people to tell them that God's anointed one had arrived. Certainly, few of them trusted her and they came to see this man she spoke of. They came to Jesus because they were thirsty too. They yearned to know God. They came to him for living water, and their thirst was quenched! They were shunned and mistreated by the Jews and to hear that the Messiah had come was amazing. But even more so that he had come to their well - to their town. Their thirst was greater than their mistrust. And in the end they said, **“We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”**

## SECOND READING:

While the Second Reading of today from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans does not draw on the symbol of water, it does comment on the question of God's love for sinners and justification by faith. St. Paul says that faith and hope enable us to be open to the love of God because it has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit that has been given to us through Christ. The Divine love of God assures salvation to those who are justified. Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through peace with God, our reconciliation replaces our alienation that was caused by the disobedience of Adam. Our justification, St. Paul further says, comes from God and not from ourselves. God loves us, and sent his Son to die for us. He points out that it is very hard to die for a good person or a relative, but almost impossible to die for someone who is evil or uncaring. Yet God has done this for us. He died for us while we were sinners and faithless. Truly God is kind and merciful.

## CONCLUSION:

The Israelite people were thirsty. Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well were thirsty. There are a lot of thirsty people in our world. There are also a lot of people in our world who thirst for God. Like the Samaritan woman at the well they ask, *'Where do I find God?'* Like the Samaritan woman, we need to look at our own lives and see what we have to do to move into the new life that Jesus has been talking about, the life of grace.

We also have a thirst like the Israelite people and the Samaritan woman. What is it that we are thirsting for? By our baptism we have been given the gift of faith and eternal life, but what steps do we have to take to live that life? Do we still thirst for material things, for bodily pleasures, for power or status? How can we let the waters that Jesus describes, quench that thirst in us? Jesus is the source of that water, and by going to Jesus we will find the help, the fullness, the refreshment we need.

During this Lenten Season then, let us come to the well and meet Jesus there. He will give us living water, which is water that does not run out because it grows from within, and it quenches our deepest thirst – the thirst for God - **“My soul thirsts for God, the living God!”** And this is the Good News of today.

**Source: Albert Lakra**

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