

**ECHOING GOD’S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY
Third Sunday of Lent
March 12, 2023**

Lectionary Readings:

Exodus 17:3-7	In the desert, Israel thirsted for more than water.
Romans 5:1-2, 5-8	God has loved us to the point of giving his Son's life.
John 4:5-42	The Woman of Samaria thirsted for eternal life.

BIBLE BACKGROUND:

John:

The Church has long valued this passage from John’s Gospel as one of the major teachings to be shared with the catechumens in their final approach to the Vigil of Easter, when they will enter the waters of baptism and find new life in Christ Jesus. The thirst of the Samaritan woman finds its echo in all of our souls as we yearn for a closer relationship with God. The process of conversion from sin to godliness is well described here for all, both the baptized and those to be baptized.

Samaritans were a mixed breed of people, despised by the Jews. They were descendants of the remnants of the Israelites left when the Northern Kingdom was devastated by Assyrian invasion in 721 BCE. Inter-marriage between Assyrian and Israelite people led to a hybrid kind of religious faith in which only the first Five Books of the Bible (Torah) were accepted as Scripture. They did not worship at Jerusalem as did the Jews but had their own temple on Mount Gerizim in Samaria.

The Church sees at least three elements of Christian baptism in this passage:

1. The overture of God to the sinner. Jesus takes the initiative in addressing the woman. Jesus offers salvation to a person who needs it very much, all the while perhaps being unaware that she needs it. Her *thirst for God* has led her into a life that was less than honorable, even among Samaritans. The fact that she comes to the well at noon, when no one else is likely to be there, may be due to her having been rejected by the other women of the village.

2. The faith-response and subsequent conversion of the sinner. The woman asks Jesus to give her the water that will satisfy her thirst. She yearns for more than she has now in her life. She is open to what God can give her. Her multiple marriages have not only alienated her from the other people in the village, but she has become alienated from herself in self-rejection and hostility. She attacks because she is so insecure.

3. The mission of the disciple to proclaim the Good News to others. She goes to tell others about the one she has found who will provide for all their needs. Having heard the truth about herself, her life, and about God, she hurries to share it with other people. Having been healed of her sinfulness, the woman becomes an evangelizer: she calls others to Jesus Christ the Messiah.

Water in John's Gospel always alludes to the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that gives life to the soul of the sinner who seeks to be reconciled with God. The Spirit comes with salvation for the person who enters the water, the person who allows the Spirit of God to wash over the heart and the soul. The thirst of the sinner is quenched by the *living water* that Jesus gives. Comfort and consolation come to the person who allows God's love to sweep into his/her very being. Thirst may have taken us far from God, seeking satisfaction in what is not God. That same thirst will lead us back to God. The side roads we have taken into sin lead us back to the God who is our only destination.

After Mary, Mother of Jesus, the Samaritan woman is portrayed as the first woman to urge people to come to Jesus. Mary said at Cana, "Do whatever he tells you." This woman says, "Come and see this man who has told me all my sins and has forgiven me."

Exodus:

The Book of Exodus gives two versions of the Water from the Rock (see 15:22-27). The children of the Exodus thirsted for God in the same way as they thirsted for water. Water became a powerful symbol of the life-giving power of God in their lives. For people who dwell in the desert, water becomes a matter of life or death. To have water is to live; to have a God who satisfies their every need is to have life and existence itself.

Romans:

The Letter to the Romans speaks of God's saving love for us in Jesus Christ our Savior. God did not save us because we were good and acceptable. But, such was the love of God that we were saved when we were still in our sins. Salvation began for us in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and continues now in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Even in this life now, we already share in the glory of God that will be fulfilled in us when the salvation of all people has been completed in the heavenly kingdom.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Share with others some of the ways in which God has provided you with "living water." How has God met your needs when you were in serious difficulty? Tell others what God has done for you when you were in need. Tell of how you had come to a point that you were isolating yourself from family and friends, so deep was your distress. Tell of how Christ came to you with words of healing and of love.

2. What price have you had to pay for being faithful to Jesus Christ? What has it cost you? What have you had to give up? The woman at the well had to give up her sinful life, even the good parts of it. What good things have you hesitated to give up out of fear that you would have nothing to go on? What has been your experience of decisions you have made to do good things in your life?

3. Jesus saw beyond the woman's sinfulness; He saw a heart that really yearned for God despite her confusion, her hostility, and her mistakes. Are there some people you know whose negative behavior is really a "thirst for God"? Do you know people who act in a hostile way when they just need more love and care? Do you sometimes do that, too?

PRAYER

**All-merciful Father,
through your Son, you revealed your mercy
to the woman of Samaria,
and moved by that same care,
you offered salvation to all sinners.
Look favorably on these Chosen Ones, the Elect,
who desire to become your adopted children
through the power of your sacraments.
Free them from sin, from the crushing yoke of Satan,
that they may serve you faithfully always.**
(Adapted from the Rite of Scrutinies)

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

The human heart thirsts for God in so many different ways. There is a yearning in the very depth of our nature that can be satisfied only by the God who made us out of love for us and called us into fellowship with him for all eternity. There is a craving in our souls that tends toward fulfillment in relationships and in union with another. The mind seeks to know and searches for truth at all times. The will wants to love and to be joined to that that it loves. Our very bodies tend toward union with another in sexual joining. All of these limited inclinations are signs of the radical urge by which we are drawn toward God and toward union with God forever. The human heart is incomplete until it has been joined to God in the most intimate union of love.

The physical thirst for water, so much needed for the survival and growth of all life forms, gives us an image of the spiritual thirst that draws us toward the source of all life and of eternal life. In our need for water, we see a sign of our need for a satisfying relationship with God. Human beings have sought to express and to satisfy this yearning for union with God in so many ways. Vast religious systems have come into being in an effort to reach that goal. Prayers and sacrifices, rituals and processes of meditation have been invented in the thirst for satisfaction of the spiritual quest. Religions all tend toward that goal of quenching the thirst of the soul for God.

It is the loving heart of God that stands behind all these efforts on the part of human beings. God as Creator has made our hearts with that kind of need imbedded deeply within. The quest for happiness is a God-given urge that comes from our being created by a loving Father with whom we need to be in relationship. It is God's will that we should search for and find God in a relationship that will last forever.

Human beings, at times, rebel against that call from God and try to smother it. We can pervert the goal and seek satisfaction in false gods, in partial satisfactions, in disordered processes, and in sinful indulgences. It has been said that addictions come in when we substitute a limited spirit for the Spirit which is God. It may not be any accident that ancient people referred to alcohol as "spirits."

St. Augustine said that the human heart is restless until it rests in God. That very restlessness is the work of God, too. We yearn because God has made us to yearn. We thirst because God has made us thirsty.

(See **The Catechism: # 27-30**)

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