

Homily For The Third Sunday in Lent - Year A

St Peter's 9:30, 11:30, 5:00 Masses, March 15, 2020

Exodus 17:3-7 "The children of Israel quarreled and test the Lord, saying is the Lord among us or not?"

Psalms "Your ancestors tested me, and put me to the proof, though they had seen my works."

Romans 5:1-2,5-8 "While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly, for us."

John 4:5-42 "I am he (the Messiah) who is speaking to you."

I'm Thirsty But Don't Know Why

Introduction

There's this man and he's travelling across the desert when he runs out of water. Luckily, he sees a man coming towards him on a camel, to whom he says: "I'm thirsty. Have you got any water?" The other man says, "No, I haven't, but I've got a wonderful selection of ties. Would you like to buy one?" The man says, "No, of course not!" and he watches sadly as the other man rides away on his camel.

About an hour or two later, and desperately thirsty, he sees a beautiful 5-star hotel. He drags himself up the steps, crying: "Water! Water!" The hotel manager goes over and stops the man, saying: "I'm sorry, sir. You can't come in here without a tie."

Now that man in this silly story could not have known that he would need to be dressed in a certain way in order to get water and quench his thirst. But there is something he could have done something about to save his life. With the right attitude, he could have asked some questions about why the man was selling ties in the desert, is there water up ahead where you just came from. He could also have shared his dire situation and asked for any help the man might give. Of course, then the joke would be lost but physical life and death is not a joke. Neither is spiritual life.

Even if we are not physically thirsty, today our spiritual lives are at risk. As a culture, there are powerful forces out there trying to sell us something that has

no power to save us from the death of our souls. We are being offered countless things to make us look good, feel good

The world feels very dangerous right now, doesn't it? Since we were last together here as a community worshipping God, something has changed drastically. Most of us are feeling vulnerable in a way that we weren't just a week ago. People have been buying up water to store for having to be isolated or for whatever is to happen. That makes sense. As in today's readings, water is life. People all over the world are also buying up toilet paper. That, I am having a lot more trouble understanding.

This kind of panicking is a reminder that, when faced with a legitimate crisis, as we are with the corona virus, or COVID-19, today you and I and everyone else, together we are faced with a test of faith. Is it a conspiracy? Wrong question. Is it divine retribution for the evil in the world? Maybe, but that's really not a useful question either. Am I doing everything I can to keep me and my loved ones safe? That is a better question and one we should respond to by doing everything we can to respond to the threat.

But the most important question might not get asked at all. Our health authorities won't ask it. God bless them for what they are working hard to do on our behalf. In a public bathroom, the lineup was three deep to wash my hands, so that message is getting through. But the health authorities won't provide the list of things to keep our souls safe. Our politicians and many other leaders in our culture, they aren't helping us answer the most important question. What's that question? Will you put your trust in God who has made us for the specific purpose of true peace and joy, in the middle of the hard circumstances of this life and for an eternity of praising him in eternity.

When God confronted Adam in the garden after they had disobeyed the one commandment he gave them, Adam said: I was afraid, so I hid myself. We are all afraid to some degree or other, but hiding ourselves will lead to death even if we manage to have enough water and toilet paper in this life.

Every organization we deal with is assuring us that we can trust them to do everything in their power to make sure we are safe. That's nice. It's reassuring. It's genuinely good. We really are seeing signs of pulling together as a society to beat this thing.

But the question, in the particular challenging circumstances we are facing together, is: will we turn to the God who has given us these lives we are trying desperately to protect, who wants to be in relationship as beloved sons and daughters. Will we trust in God. Jesus reminds us, it will give you no profit if you gain the whole world but lose your soul.

Exodus

The people of Israel felt vulnerable. They were thirsty. The desert wilderness is the place of thirsting. It was so intense to them that it seemed worse than slavery. They were used to slavery. They weren't used to the freedom God gave them. They turned against God. They turned their anger on Moses, who represented God to them: You have brought us out here to kill us with thirst. The children of Israel tested the Lord: "Is the Lord among us or not?" We might ask the same question: Where is God in all this? Is the Lord among us or not?

God tells Moses that he will be there at the rock. Note that this is the beginning of their 40 years in the desert. During Jesus' 40 days in the desert, Satan said to him three times: If you are the son of God ... so the temptation that the people fall prey to, probably inspired by Satan, is the same one that Satan uses against Jesus i.e. Prove how great you are.

They blame Moses AND God. Remember how Adam, when God confronted him about whether they had eaten the forbidden fruit, said: The woman you gave me (you know, her) gave it to me and I ate. So, in the desert, we hear an echo of why intimacy with God had been lost and why we needed a saviour.

Living Water

Jesus sent the disciples away so he could be alone. The woman came to the well. She was alone. They talked. She asked questions. He invited her to look up from her limited perspective. She gradually went there with him. He challenged her and she accepted the challenge. By the end of the interaction, she became the one introducing people to Jesus Christ. Jesus wants to be alone with them also. He wants to be alone with us. He wants to be alone with you.

The woman said to him: I know that the Messiah is coming, who is called the Christ. Jesus said to her: I am he, the one who is speaking to you. Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. The Samaritans asked him to stay with them. And many more believed because of his word and no longer because of the woman's testimony.

Leaving her water jar is significant. She went there for water from the well and went back to tell people about water for which a jar was not necessary or helpful.

While we are all anxious about illness, this is the absolute perfect time to turn to God and say I love you. I need you in my life, I give all my anxiety to you. I offer this part of my life to you. Come to me and quench my thirst for life. If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is asking, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.

Yes, it's a big jump: from the natural world to the supernatural, from what is temporary to the eternal, from the physical to the spiritual, from lower to higher, from darkness to the fullness of the light of Christ. Here he say: The one who drinks of the water I will give will never be thirsty again. It will become a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.

As crazy a notion as that is, the stirring in her becomes a great and profound hope, a gushing of living water in her. We are not alone. We have not been abandoned. God loves her and has a plan for her life.

And then the key symbol of her transformation: "She left the water jar ... She got it. Not that water is not important, but she can leave behind that concern for a

greater one - her salvation and her whole town. The man who was just "sir" became prophet, then Christ, then Saviour of the world.

After the encounter with Jesus, she is so transformed that she converts her town and they come to believe?

John 6:32-35 Later Jesus will say: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

Later still Jesus will cry out from the cross: "I thirst." The God of the universe made man, experiences the worst of thirsts. He knows our experience. He knows that we thirst for water for our bodies. He wants us to have that but, much more, he is offering us the water that will be a spring within our own souls, gushing up to eternal life.

Is the Lord With Us?

God tells the people of Israel: I will be standing there in front of you on the rock. The psalmist reminds us: He is our God and we are the people of his pasture. Paul explains to the Romans: While we were still sinners (enemies of God), Christ died for us. John in his Gospel: I am he (the Messiah), the one who is speaking to you.

Today, Jesus is waiting by the well for us to come by with our worldly concerns, Jesus is speaking to you today. Will you drink the living water he is offering you today? Come to Jesus. Come to the water.

This Lent is one more major opportunity for us to recognize our God, to worship him, even in the wilderness of our lives. Or we can go on testing God to see if he really is God. We can also go along with the culture which acts as if there is no God. Let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker. For he is our God, and we are his people. O that today you would listen to his voice! Do not harden your hearts.

Jesus is sitting by himself at a well. He asks a woman for a drink. It's the opening of a conversation that he also wants to have for us. Jesus needed water, like everyone. But he didn't become our nature for water. He came for us. He is thirsty for us.