

Homily For the 3rd Sunday of Lent- Year A (Replacing Year C Readings)

St. Peter's Sunday Vigil Masses, March 23, 2019

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

Psalm 95: 1-9 "Oh, that today you would listen to his voice. Harden not your hearts as at Meribah."

Romans 5: 1-2, 5-8 "God proves his love for us in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us."

John: 4: 5-42 "One who drinks of the water I give will never be thirsty. It will spring up to eternal life."

Living Water

Introduction

This weekend begins a great movement towards the peak experience for the community of the Christian faith. That's Easter. This is also a spoiler alert for what is coming up.

Jesus asks a woman for water, and she is the one who ends up receiving a spring of eternal life for her spiritual thirst.

A man born blind asks to see and ends up seeing that Jesus is the messiah.

Lazarus dies and Jesus weeps openly, before raising him back to life.

Jesus offers a Passover sacrifice, first with bread and wine, then in his own blood.

Thirst In The Desert

But our story begins with some desert stories and being thirsty. I have just one joke for the kids. Question: What should you take on a trip to the desert? Answer: A thirst aid kit! Ok, that's all I'm going to do like that.

Four men were adrift on a life boat in the Atlantic. They were trying to wring out drops of water from pieces of canvas so as not to die of thirst. Their rescuers told them that they could have just cupped their hands in the ocean and drank fresh water. In that location, the Amazon River put out so much fresh water out into

the ocean that, even miles from shore, it was drinkable. If only they had known how easily their thirst could have been satisfied.

The Israelite people had already complained to Moses about food. And, they had already been given manna for the morning and the quail for meat in the evenings. Yet they are quite the drama queens with their complaints: Why did you bring us out of Egypt where there was water? Did you bring us out here to kill us? Is God with us or not? Moses, what are you going to do about it? It's a good thing none of us would complain like that. If only they had known how easily their thirst could have been satisfied.

The psalmist says about God: At Meribah and Massah, they challenged me and provoked me although they had seen all my works. Couldn't we say: When at Calgary and at Lethbridge, they challenged me and provoked me although they had seen all my works?

The people were used to the gods of the land they had left. Their first thought when there was any stress, like being thirsty, was to want to go back to slavery and to the gods they had. Those gods had certain characteristics but you couldn't really depend on them to do what you think they would. Even though the God of all being had brought them out of slavery, they had no concept of a God who is true to his word, who acts justly, who guarantees covenant with his people. I don't suppose I ever turn away from God to the gods of things of this world to satisfy my thirst.

Instead, they can imagine this God tricking them into going out in the wilderness to kill them all. Moses was the spokesperson of this God, so he was the target of their bitter complaints. 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. We blame each other and God for our failures and for our discomforts.

Thirst At The Well

More than a thousand years later, Jesus is sitting by himself at a well. He asks a woman for a drink. Strange isn't it? Couldn't he get it himself? But Jesus has something else in mind for her. 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.

Conversion Step By Step

The woman in this story is key, because she is us. Let's look at how she comes to God, step by step. She answers his request with the wisdom of the world. Why are you asking me? Jewish men don't talk to Samaritan women. After all, she is a member of a hated race, avoided at all costs. Actually, they avoided each other after centuries of animosity.

Instead of an answer, she gets an invitation: 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.

She is intrigued now. She wants to know more about him. She, still thinking about water, wonders if he might know of a source of moving (living) water, which is way better than stagnant water from a well. That image always reminds me of a cat we had and how much he loved to drink from the tap when it was running, or even the toilet when it's flushed. That water is alive. It gushes.

But Jesus tells her about water that won't just satisfy thirst in a temporary way. It's a big jump: from the natural to the supernatural, from the temporal to the eternal, from the physical to the spiritual, from lower to higher, from the darker to fullness of light. 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.

Do you feel her the movement of her heart as she : Could he be the one? In a quiet place in a thirsty desert, there is a stirring of the thirst for God, for the one who is beyond wells, and deserts and ordinary thirsts and satisfactions.

This is the movement of Baptism. This is the pouring of water that the Church Fathers called 'the Illumination' because it floods the soul with supernatural light.

She begins to think more about God. "Where should we worship him." Not in a place, he says, but in spirit- in your spirit, in the Holy Spirit, and in the truth of who you are and who God is and what God wants to accomplish in you.

Up the steps of conversion, she asks about the Messiah. "I am the one who is speaking to you." 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. Wouldn't it be amazing if people could see that in us? Wouldn't it be amazing if we could pour out cups of the living water gushing up in us?

Have You Brought Us Here To Kill Us?

What is it we are really thirsting for. I see myself going to refrigerator and the pantry dozens of times some days. Only occasionally do I stop and say, what's going on here? Are you hungry? Are you thirsty. The answer is usually No. Yet I am looking for something. Then I realize that this is a spiritual hunger, a spiritual thirst. It's the thirst for living water so that I can be truly satisfied.

There probably will be a next time that we think: God have you just brought me here to kill me? Paul says, hold on to the hope that does not disappoint because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

Is the Lord With Us?

There probably will be a next time we ask, Is the Lord with us? Harken to what we hear today:

From Exodus: I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb.

From the Psalm: He is our God and we are the people of his pasture.

From the letter to the Romans: While we were still sinners (enemies of God), Christ died for us.

From the Gospel of John: I am he (the Messiah), the one who is speaking to you.

What about today: While the world is so thirsty, wrapped up in complaints from jealousy, anxiety and darkness, 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.