

Homily for 3rd Sunday of Lent, Year A
By Fr. Jerome Ituah, OCD
Readings: Exo 17:3-7; Ps 94(95); Rom 5:1-2,5-8; Jn 4:5-42
Theme: Lord, we are thirsty!

Our first reading from the book of Exodus begins with the words, ‘the people thirsted there for water.’ The people of Israel were in the wilderness of Sin, and they camped in a place called Rephidim, and there was no water for them to drink. Rather than approach God in trust, they grumbled against Moses, asking why he brought them out of Egypt. They had forgotten the wonders God did to get them out of Egypt. Indirectly, they were grumbling against God, who used Moses to bring them out. Moses, in turn, cried to God. God asked Moses to take some of the elders and the miraculous staff to strike the rock, Horeb, to provide water for the people. The people did not trust in God. But instead, as the Psalmist tells us, they put God to the test. Because of the lack of water, the people forget all God has done for them.

In the gospel, Jesus went to the Samaritan town of Sychar and sat by Jacob’s well because he was tired. Then, a Samaritan woman came to draw water from the well of Jacob. Jacob’s well is synonymous with a place where one finds his future bride. That was where Jacob met his future wife (cf. Gen 29:10-12). Jesus, as the Son of God, has come to wed us to God. Jesus sat beside the well because he was tired, and then the woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus demanded a drink of water from her. But she responded, ‘How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?’ The author of the gospel tells us that Jews and Samaritans have no dealings. We cannot go into all the reasons. Still, it suffices to say that it goes back to the history of the exile of the northern kingdom when the Assyrians took the people of Samaria into exile and settled a new people there. The Samaritans were no longer pure Israelite blood as far as the Jews were concerned. The Jews looked down on them. So, the woman was surprised that Jesus demanded a drink from an unholy person. But Jesus came to mend the broken relationships in the world. Hence, he says, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink.’

What gift is Jesus referring to? Jesus himself is the gift that God has given to the world. He is the one who will quench our thirst. The prophet Jeremiah complained that the people had forgotten God, their fountain of living waters (cf. Jer 2:13; 17:13). Hence, He says, ‘whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”’ (Jn 7:38). Jesus comes as the fountain of that living water (cf. Jn 7:37; Rev 21:6; 22:1). Therefore, there is a strong relationship between that gift of God and the person asking for a drink. The person asking for a drink is the very gift of God. Hence Jesus says, ‘you would have asked him to give you living water.’ He would have given you living water. The woman came to draw ordinary water from the well. But Jesus takes her to a spiritual reality. ‘Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.’ (Jn 4:14). Our spiritual thirst can only be satisfied when we turn to Jesus; when he fills us with that living water, we receive his spirit. In the second reading, Paul rightly describes how the Holy Spirit given to us has poured God’s love into the hearts of those who believe.

The challenges before us today are: for what are we thirsty? How do we react to situations of lack? Where do we seek to quench our thirst? And what do we use to quench that thirst? The people of Israel were thirsty for physical water for themselves and their cattle. Their reaction was complaint and grumbling against Moses. And God gave them water from the rock to quench their thirst. What about you? Do you seek only material and physical things to quench your thirst, or will you ask for living water, the Spirit of God, like the woman in the gospel? Do you go all out to seek to quench your thirst in any way possible, even if it is a foul way of getting it, or do you cry to and rely on the Lord? And when God gives you water to quench your thirst, do you accept it with gratitude and share the good news with others like the woman in the gospel?