

022408 3rd Sunday In Lent

Peace be with you.... In those days, in their thirst for water, the people grumbled against the mayors of Payson and Star Valley, saying, "Why did we ever leave our former homeland? Was it just to have us die here of thirst?"

I have in my hand – the front page of a Christmas letter that I received from a holy woman – Her name is Lucille and she is a mountain top dweller... a contemplative who lives alone. She lives by the Grace of God, but also on donations. She supports and has supported hundreds in a phone ministry of spiritual counseling – and she is involved in person-to-person prayer ministry... She also has taught deacons and their wives in Denver. Here are words from her Christmas letter:

"For nine winters, we have had a snow drought. Predicted storms have yielded a skiff of dry snow that quickly blows away. The earth has been parched and cracked and the trees sad and needy – over and over I have prayed for desperately needed moisture... and.... Just before Christmas, the sky opened up for four days and four nights and tons and tons of snow descended upon this holy mountain. Seven and a half feet in all ebbed and flowed around the house like a vast ocean... Not only was I snowbound, I was housebound. It reminded me of the Canadian arctic where I served the Lord for seven years...." Her letter goes on....

Many times, over nine years, I have visited this mountain retreat that she speaks of. It is best to take a 4-wheel drive to get up there. And from her letter, I can share that it took many volunteers and vehicles to bring mail and food to her this winter in Colorado. What was it that was on the first page of her letter? A severe lack of water.

And now in today's readings, we heard about water... and though they speak to us about moisture – there is a deeper question and message that is brought to us in these writings. Let me unfold this in the way it came to me.

One of the things I'm doing for Lent is that I am reading the Gospel of John.... By this I mean that I am reading, pausing, meditating on John and his writings. And if I had heard it said before, I had forgotten something. Do you know what John talks about in his Gospel a great deal? Water! Yes water... In fact – water is mentioned something like seventeen times in the first six chapters. When I first realized this, I thought maybe it was a form of writing oriented to people who live in the desert setting as the Jews do. Then I began to think that maybe it's a message for any folks who live in areas where water is an issue.

And so I prayed, asking the Holy Spirit what John's Scripture might be about... Water necessary for baptism... men and women must be reborn of water and the Spirit.... Water miraculously changed to wine at the wedding at Cana.... Jesus baptizing others in water after being baptized by John.... The woman at the well in Samaria – Jesus promising 'living water.'

And, oh yes – the man who was ill for thirty eight years and who needed someone to stir up the waters so he could be healed...and in John's Gospel is that image of Jesus walking on water....

Dear friends – after prayer and thought – this came to me. In a recent homily about the beatitudes, I talked about the most basic... the most powerful need that we humans experience... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for holiness or righteousness... their need will be satisfied... We are God's people, and yet what most of us don't recognize or acknowledge is that we are trying to satisfy our most basic thirst with noise or busyness or television or food or booze.... with being ever-moving soccer moms... or shoppers or buyers of yet another tool or gadget... or grandparents who aren't content unless they are doing something... And if any of those examples resonate with you... you are probably passing those behaviors on to your children or grandchildren.

And down deep, when we aren't truly satisfied by earthly diversions, we remain unsatisfied and we grumble: "Is the LORD in our midst or not?" Am I getting anything out of coming to this Church? It seems like such a waste of time..." The self-focus is the same focus expressed by the thirsty Jews.

Maybe like the woman whose newsletter I quoted from, we ought to spend our Lent really trying to come closer to the Lord... begging for his life-giving and eternal water, as well as asking for real moisture for our ecosystem.

This may sound like a call meant for monks and mountain-top recluses... maybe we ought to be on our faces, thanking God for all his gifts to us... and begging for what he alone can provide for us.

One of my favorite areas of Biblical writings is found in the Book of Daniel... In one area, there are repetitive, hypnotic words done in a beautiful cadence... ***Every shower and dew, bless the Lord... Ice and snow, bless the Lord, You springs, bless the Lord, Seas and rivers, bless the Lord.... Light and darkness, bless the Lord.***
Give thanks to the Lord for he is good... praise him and give him thanks, for his mercy endures forever.

Those words acknowledge that every drop of rain, every form of moisture... the seasons... they all are a part of the gifts and plan of the Good God. We may have to suffer aridity – great dryness in our town, our mountains, and maybe in our hearts... but let us come before the Lord this Lent and in our own prayers and devotions... let us say to him that we recognize that He is truly in our midst and we depend upon him for everything.... Everything.

In closing – I quote from Psalm 63 – imagine this as a hymn: O God, you are my God, for you I long; for you my soul is thirsting. My body pines for you like a dry, weary land without water. So I gaze on you in the sanctuary to see your strength and your glory.... And the response from a heavenly chorus rings out: Who ever thirsts will drink freely of life-giving water.

Reading 1

Ex 17:3-7

In those days, in their thirst for water, the people grumbled against Moses, saying, “Why did you ever make us leave Egypt? Was it just to have us die here of thirst with our children and our livestock?” So Moses cried out to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? a little more and they will stone me!” The LORD answered Moses, “Go over there in front of the people, along with some of the elders of Israel, holding in your hand, as you go, the staff with which you struck the river. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock in Horeb. Strike the rock, and the water will flow from it for the people to drink.”

This Moses did, in the presence of the elders of Israel. The place was called Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled there and tested the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD in our midst or not?”

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

R. (8) If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts. Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD; let us acclaim the Rock of our salvation. Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us joyfully sing psalms to him.

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts. Come, let us bow down in worship; let us kneel before the LORD who made us. For he is our God, and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides.

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts. Oh, that today you would hear his voice: “Harden not your hearts as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the desert, Where your fathers tempted me; they tested me though they had seen my works.”

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Reading II

Rom 5:1-2, 5-8

Brothers and sisters: Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God.

And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. For Christ, while we were still helpless, died at the appointed time for the ungodly. Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person, though perhaps for a good person one might even find courage to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

Gospel

Jn 4:5-42 or 4:5-15, 19b-26, 39a, 40-42

Jesus came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there. Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down there at the well. It was about noon. A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" —For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.—

Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep; where then can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this cistern and drank from it himself with his children and his flocks?" Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." Jesus said to her, "Go call your husband and come back." The woman answered and said to him, "I do not have a husband." Jesus answered her, "You are right in saying, 'I do not have a husband.' For you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true." The woman said to him, "Sir, I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain; but you people say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem."

Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You people worship what you do not understand; we worship what we understand, because salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit

and truth.” The woman said to him, “I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Christ; when he comes, he will tell us everything.” Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one speaking with you.” At that moment his disciples returned, and were amazed that he was talking with a woman, but still no one said, “What are you looking for?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

The woman left her water jar and went into the town and said to the people, “Come see a man who told me everything I have done. Could he possibly be the Christ?” They went out of the town and came to him. Meanwhile, the disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat of which you do not know.” So the disciples said to one another, “Could someone have brought him something to eat?”

Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work.

Do you not say, ‘In four months the harvest will be here’? I tell you, look up and see the fields ripe for the harvest. The reaper is already receiving payment and gathering crops for eternal life, so that the sower and reaper can rejoice together. For here the saying is verified that ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap what you have not worked for; others have done the work, and you are sharing the fruits of their work.”

Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me everything I have done.” When the Samaritans came to him, they invited him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. Many more began to believe in him because of his word, and they said to the woman, “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.”