

3rd SUNDAY OF LENT – A (March 12, 2023)

[1st: In a recent bulletin I wrote about how I'd soon be scheduling meetings of our parish pastoral and finance councils, and especially to begin the process of setting parish goals in connection with our archdiocesan planning process. Those meetings are now scheduled; the first will be on March 21 at Lourdes and the other four will be on other Tuesdays in March and April. The full schedule will be in next week's bulletin. Council members: if you have not yet received a mailing about this, you will soon.]

We hear about thirst today—the Israelites were thirsty in their desert travels, and Jesus was tired and thirsty when he asked the Samaritan woman for a drink at the well. We all know what that feels like; I remember growing up on the farm working outside on those hot summer days. Nothing, but nothing in the world tasted better than a glass of wonderfully cold water from our pumphouse—straight from the underground well. And there is a deeper thirst that we all have, whether we are always aware of that thirst or not...and that is our thirst, our desire for God. St. Augustine said it so well about 1600 years ago: 'you have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.' God made us, created us, to thirst for him—and that thirst will not and cannot be fully quenched until we dedicate ourselves completely to him.

But there is another kind of thirst at work in this gospel story, and that is Jesus' thirst, God's thirst for us. Do you know that God not only loves you, but he in fact desires you, thirsts for you, longs for you? If you think that sounds like some kind of passionate love story, you are spot-on correct! Jesus showed that thirst at the well, his thirst for the love and salvation of that Samaritan woman. And he did so to the point of breaking two strong taboos: 1) at that time in history, woman's place in society was second-class at best—in many cultures she was thought of as little more than her husband's property. And secondly: as John tells us, the Jews had nothing to do with the Samaritans; there was long-standing animosity between them. And yet, here we have Jesus—not only speaking to a Samaritan woman, but actually engaging her in dialogue and inviting her to salvation. This whole scene would have been seen as nothing short of scandalous by the 'proper authorities'. By the way, this conversation between Jesus and the woman is portrayed beautifully in "The Chosen" in the eighth and last episode of Season One—if you haven't seen it yet, I strongly and highly recommend it. We have DVD copies available at the office; you are more than welcome to borrow it.

What is your vision of God? Is he some infinitely distant deity who is just waiting for us to slip up so he can condemn us? Or do we see God as the One who loves us completely and passionately, who will stop at nothing to offer us his love and mercy...even to the point of sacrificing his Son for us to make that happen? That's exactly the point that St. Paul made so well in the second reading: "God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us." One of the things that Jesus said while dying on the cross was "I thirst", and he certainly did experience a horrendous physical thirst from the blood loss resulting from his scourging, being crowned with thorns, and everything else he endured. But saints and theologians throughout Christian history have spoken of the deeper meaning of Jesus' thirst—his deep thirst for souls, for all humanity to find joy, rest, and salvation in him. St. Teresa of Calcutta had a strong devotion to the thirst of Christ—on the wall of her order's chapel were Jesus' words "I thirst". She wanted her sisters to remember and live out our Savior's thirst and love for every soul—especially the poorest of the poor.

No other religion in the world presents such an amazing, unimaginable claim: a God who loves us so deeply and passionately that he spares no expense at all in offering us the chance to be with him forever in perfect joy—not even sparing his own Son. This can seem so unbelievable; in fact, some other faiths do not accept it precisely because it seems so utterly unfathomable. Yet this claim of our Christian faith is in fact not simply a claim, but is rather the truth...and Jesus' resurrection from the dead (which we will celebrate in four short weeks) is the exclamation point that verifies that claim as truth.

God loves us in ways that our mere human words cannot fully express; Jesus thirsts for every single one of us. He so strongly desires us to accept, embrace, and love him so that he can fulfill his own desire to accept, embrace, and love each of us into indescribable joy. The woman at the well came to know that love and mercy of Jesus. Her thirst for truth and meaning was satisfied by Jesus, and his thirst for her soul was satisfied by her grateful and joyful acceptance of his gift. May it be the same for each of us, now and forever.