

Third Sunday of Lent

Living Water

March 15, 2020

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The sacrament of Baptism is highlighted in our readings today:

Moses, providing water for the exodus journey of the Israelite people. St. Paul, reminding us that this water of the Spirit has been poured forth in great abundance.

Jesus, referring to himself as the source of living water to the woman at Jacob's well.

Baptism – living water.

In the first reading, from the Book of Exodus, a crowd argues with Moses, but it is clear that their argument is really about God. Their sin: their failure to appreciate what God had already accomplished for them in freeing them from slavery in Egypt especially. This is a common sin that anyone can fall prey to – in the midst of a new challenge – like the Coronavirus – forgetting that God is still with us.

“If today you hear God's voice, harden not your heart” is the Psalm refrain. In other words, do not commit the sin of obstinacy that your ancestors committed. Continue to trust in God, the “rock of our salvation” regardless of the circumstances you are encountering. God, the Good Shepherd, is still guiding us.

In the reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans, Paul reflects on God's grace and how it has been poured forth superabundantly after the death and resurrection of Jesus, in the giving of the Spirit. Unmerited by us, a gratuitous gift. The life in the Spirit places those who believe in a state of peace with God, which gives us hope. The Spirit gives us certainty of future glory.

The gospel story presents us with both ordinary and extraordinary moments: Jesus tired from a day's walk with his disciples; they go off to buy some provisions for the day; a well that has water to quench his thirst; a woman from the nearby town coming for water as she probably did each day: ordinary activities. And then the story gets interesting.

Put yourself in the woman's “shoes.” (or sandals!) She is startled to hear a Jewish man at the well asking her for a drink, she a Samaritan. Jews considered Samaritans to be unorthodox, having departed from a number of traditional beliefs; in John's gospel they are seen as “half – Jews.” And then, his insight into her private life; “how on earth could he know that,” she thinks to herself! What is in store for her is an unexpected journey of faith.

Step One: She speaks to Jesus of natural water; he speaks to her of spiritual water, “living water,” a special gift of God. Grace. “A spring of water welling up to

eternal life.” Jesus gives her the opportunity to grow in faith. She, this many times married woman – a sinner in the eyes of her townsfolk - accepts his invitation and asks him to give her this kind of water. (no transgression is so great as to keep us from the mercy of the Lord if we have the humility to ask for it).

Step Two: On her faith journey: The woman says to Jesus, “I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Christ; when he comes, he will tell us everything.” Jesus responds: “I am he, the one who is speaking with you.” She believes and rushes off to her town to tell her townsfolk what had happened to her at the well (which is Step Three: Mission) Her growth in faith results in her move toward mission, as a bearer of the Word.

Author and theologian, Megan McKenna, sums up the Gospel: “The woman at the well models for all disciples what must happen to us again and again: we must be faced with the truth during an encounter with Jesus and the Spirit, confess our sinfulness, come to a fuller awareness of who Jesus is and so who God truly is. Then we must acknowledge who Jesus is and leave our water jar at the well, now that we have the fountain of life leaping up within us, and return to our homes and confess who we are – believers in Jesus – and convert our neighbors by telling them the good news.”

CONCLUSION

Lord, I am grateful to you
for the gift of “living water.”
In your mysterious love,
you have given me
many opportunities to
grow in my faith.
May your merciful grace,
given through the Holy Spirit,
continue to transform me
and all who come into
my life.

AMEN