

Opening the Word: Thirsting for the Lord



Suffering from thirst is an all-consuming experience. The thirsty person desires water alone, longing for an occasion to slake their thirst.

The human experience of thirst is taken up in the history of salvation. Israel, having passed through the river dry-shod, find themselves thirsting in the desert. They want a drink, and they know where they can get it – they could return to Egypt.

The God who heard the cries of Israel in Egypt, who rescued them from bondage, is not enough. Israel does not yet know how to hope in God, to trust that God alone can quench their thirst. It was at Massah and Meribah that Israel tested God, questioning God's power.

Israel must learn to thirst aright, to desire God alone.

[March 15 – Third
Sunday of Lent](#)

Ex 17:3-7
Ps 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9
Rom 5:1-2, 5-8
Jn 4:5-42

In the Gospel of John, we see what good thirst consists of. Jesus is sitting at Jacob's well, the very spot where Jacob first kissed Rebekah. He is illuminated by the heat of the noonday sun. The light that shines in the darkness, that quenches all thirst, is about to manifest itself.

A Samaritan woman approaches the well. You know, of course,

everything you need to know about Samaritans. They're outsiders to the covenant, apostates who do not worship at the Temple in Jerusalem.

And yet, Jesus and the Samaritan woman share something in common – they're both thirsty. They want to quench their thirst with water from a well, to experience relief from the noonday sun.

But they don't share everything in common. Jesus may be subject to the heat of the new day sun, but as the Son, he is subject only to the Father.

Like most of the Gospel of John, the plot moves along through a confounding dialogue. Jesus asks for water, but the Samaritan woman is aghast. You asked me, a Samaritan, a woman for water!

Jesus promises living water. Living water! Give me some of this running water, says the Samaritan woman, so that I don't have to fetch water from this well.

Jesus promises a living water that will quench our thirst forever. The Samaritan woman wants this water above all. At last, no more long trips to the well in the noonday sun.

The dialogue continues as Jesus examines the Samaritan woman. She is noted to have had five husbands. Here, too many preachers will focus on this dimension of the Samaritan woman's life.

Yes, she is outside the formal dictates of the Law. But Jesus is not concerned in this encounter with the sin of adultery per se. He is concerned about thirsting for the right things. Thirsting for the living water that is his very presence, the living water of the Word made flesh, that can alone quench our desires.

In the end, Lent is the time for the whole Church to examine

how we slake our thirsts. Do we find our ultimate end in the acquisition of power, in holding grudges against our loved ones or co-workers, in acquiring wealth, in addiction to pornography, in petty gossip, in mindless television or in constant work? Do we drink from the waters of salvation, or do we seek to quench our thirst in other ways?

There is only one living water, the Word made flesh. Every other way that we try to slake our thirst will lead us to be thirsty again.

Eat and drink at this well, my friends. God seeks to quench our thirst with his body, with his blood.

Run to the altar of salvation, the well of salvation where Jesus comes to meet us week after week.

God thirsts for us, longs to be with us.

Let us thirst for God alone.

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