

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent, 12 March 2023

Scriptures: Exodus 17:3-7; Romans 5:1-2,5-8; John 4:5-42

Homily: Fr. Ken

The first reading describes the episode when after their escape from slavery in Egypt, the Israelites are in the desert begging Moses to give them water.

In the second reading from Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome, we hear that our thirsty souls need the life-giving water that is love. Through Jesus, the Spirit of Love gives us the new life for which we all long.

In the Gospel, the Samaritan woman represents all of us who thirst for the spring of water which Jesus makes available to us in himself.

The story is not unfamiliar to us. The Samaritan woman lived in a desert, perhaps of her own making. She had been married five times, and at that time lived with a man who was not one of the five. That, in itself, suggests that she survived in a constant search for love.

In all probability, her life style isolated her from scandalized neighbors. She came alone to the water well, rather than with a relative or a friend. Perhaps she hoped that no one would see her, and would give no further cause for hurtful comment and gossip.

Those who saw her speak publicly to a man resting beside the well, would certainly have raised suspicions and begun new rumors.

At first, accustomed to hide her loneliness from others, she speaks lightly and even mockingly to Jesus. She expects him, as a man and a Jew, to belittle her and make her even more conscious of her inadequacies. The woman does not anticipate courtesy and respect any more than she foresees his summary of

her failed relationships. She becomes more courageous, curious, and eventually expresses her own longing never again to need the gaze of hypocritical townsfolk in her search for water. Jesus explains that he has not come to dig another well in the town. Instead he has come to create a well in her heart, filled with the living water of God's love. Jesus gives the woman the courage to reach out to the people around her. Her life is no longer a dry, arid desert.

We in California all know what drought is like. We know what it is like to see gardens gradually turn brown and die. Farmers through the San Joaquin Valley worry about their crops and their vineyards, and their livestock, conscious that their health makes all the difference to their livelihoods and the future of families.

Many of us may not become thirsty in a drought, but we may have faced water rationing and constant media advice on ways of conserving water. On the other hand, an excess of water, as with atmospheric rivers, is equally tragic. Floods destroy life and hope.

In their loneliness, some people's hearts are shriveled and barren for lack of love. We all need to love and be loved. With love, people grow and develop in unimaginable color and texture. Life, however hard, never becomes unmanageable. That is exactly the type of transformation that Jesus promised the Samaritan woman. He did not tell her that she would never again come to the village to draw water. Instead, he offered her the new life and hope that can be born of making a fresh start. Just as rains allow lakes and rivers to be reborn, so also turning to Jesus, experiencing his love, recreates our lives. However many difficulties may fill our days, we will never again face them on our own. Our hearts need not shrivel and die. Instead, they can joyfully burst out into a new and everlasting life. All we need is Jesus. His love is the water for which our souls thirst; his love is the water that gives us nourishment, life, and hope.

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