

Third Sunday of Lent Year A Readings and Commentary

Summary by Dale J. Sieverding: The Elect (once catechumens) will be given to drink of living water, eternal life. We will be able to worship in spirit and truth...if we can ever turn from sin and be faithful to the gospel. There is no discrimination when it comes to Jesus and the offer of salvation for all. The Samaritan was the untouchable in the time of Jesus. Perhaps, the danger of the Samaritan was as a mirror for the chosen people that showed the 'warts and all' of life. Lent, time of grace. Time to take a good look in the mirror, accept yourself for who you are and what you've become; recognize the good, and turn the rest over to Christ so that you may worship in the Spirit and Truth of the living God.

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First Reading Exodus 17:3-7

Give us water, so that we may drink

A reading from the Book of Exodus

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?"

The word of the Lord

Exodus 17:3-7

Commentary by Deacon Owen Cummings: The people of Israel are on the way to the promised land, making their way through the wilderness. They are without food and without water. God provides them with the manna-bread from heaven in the passage immediately before ours. Without food we ache and are weakened. Without water we die. We can go a long time without food, but without water we cannot exist at all. The Hebrew people are now without water in the desert, they are about to die. They know this and they are complaining to Moses. They need water above everything else. Moses knows that the quarrel of the Hebrews is with God directly, and he takes their quarrel to God, as a prophet does. There is no rebuke or reprimand from God. Instead, God provides them with water through Moses, but notice those wonderful words: "I will be standing there in front of you on the rock." They need water, yes, but God is there. The Lord God "is in their midst," the source of their vitality, their life. God is the water of Israel. The French mystic, Simone Weil, once said that "The workers need poetry more than bread." Perhaps we need God's water-life more than physical life. Those who seek baptism at Easter are looking for the life-giving water, newly given by God. This is the water that gives the very life that God is. God is the water of the new Israel, the Church.

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Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

(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.

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.

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."

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

Commentary by John Paul Heil: Main Theme: LISTEN to what God may be saying to us TODAY.

This exuberant hymn is appropriately sung by pilgrims streaming into the Jerusalem temple, the place of God's special presence, to worship the God of creation and salvation with joy and thanksgiving. The invitation to acclaim God as the "rock" of our salvation acknowledges God as the ultimate origin and ever-present place of our protection, safety, and security. It also recalls the "rock" that God commanded Moses to strike with his staff so that water will flow from it for God's chosen people of Israel, wandering and grumbling in the arid wilderness, to drink for their life and salvation (see today's First Reading).

The psalm passionately urges us to hear the voice of God speaking to us today. We are not to "harden" our hearts and thus close our ears to the ways God may be speaking to us, as did our Israelite ancestors in the desert. At Meribah ("contention" or "strife") in the day of Massah ("testing") they rebelliously quarreled against and "tested" God, questioning his saving presence with them, even though God had miraculously provided them with life-giving water (First Reading). Are we failing to see the ways that God's saving presence is with us

today? How may God be speaking to us today in these scriptures, in the events of our times, in our personal lives?

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Second Reading Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

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.

The word of the Lord

Romans 5:1-2, 5-8 Commentary by Virginia Smith: This short reading is a lot like discovering a perfect five-carat diamond in a batch of much smaller stones. Many theologians and scripture scholars consider these few verses possibly the clearest, most cogent biblical description of humanity's reconciliation to God in Christ and the benefits that brings. A very ancient and reliable Greek manuscript translates the first verse slightly differently and, in doing so, changes the meaning markedly. It reads, "Since we have been

justified by faith, let us have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” A flat declaration in the NAB [New American Bible] becomes an urgent call in the Greek. What a lesson that teaches about the minefield of translation! No translation of any piece of literature, sacred or secular, can ever be entirely accurate as no language ever translates perfectly into another. New English renditions and revisions of existing ones will continue to pop up as well they should as linguists learn more about ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, not to mention modern American English.

Translation aside, these few verses from Romans explain, according to the late biblical scholar Raymond E. Brown, S.S., “what is involved in divine love: a willingness to die for sinners who do not deserve such graciousness.” The tension between justification by faith and the good works that accompany such faith has caused pain and conflict between Catholics and Protestants ever since the Reformation. Happily, understanding is growing on both sides in our post-Vatican II world.

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Gospel Acclamation cf. John 4:15, 42

Lord, you are truly the Savior of the world;
give me living water, that I may never thirst again.

Gospel (longer form) John 4:5-42

The water that I shall give will become a spring of eternal life.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

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."

The Gospel of the Lord

Lectionary for Mass in the Dioceses of the United States of America, volume I Copyright © 1970, 1997, 1998 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

John 4:5-42 Commentary by John Paul Heil

Main Theme: Jesus gives us the LIVING WATER that quenches our thirst for ETERNAL LIFE.

The Samaritan woman's eager request for Jesus to give her the living water that will quench her thirst makes us realize that Jesus promises to provide for all of us the overabundant, living water that can quench our thirst and satisfy our longing for eternal life. Jesus fulfills this promise by his life-giving death on the cross. When the side of his dead body is pricked, out flows blood and water (19:34)--"a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (4:14). The "living water" or water of eternal life that Jesus provides by laying down his life for us also represents the Spirit which enables us to authentically worship the one true God of the Samaritans (the five "husbands" of the Samaritan woman symbolize the five false gods or "husbands" her people worshipped), Jews, and all peoples--"God is Spirit and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth" (4:23).

By leaving behind her "water jar" (4:28) and bringing her people to

Jesus, the Samaritan woman models for us the conversion we need to undergo during this season of Lent from a concern with the “water” of this world to a concern for bringing ourselves and others to a deeper faith in the Jesus who, by dying for us, provides the life-giving “water” and Spirit for us to worship God in Spirit and truth and thus to live eternally.

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