

3rd Sunday of Lent - A
Exodus 17:3-7;
Romans 5:1-2, 5-8;
John 4:5-15, 19b-26, 39a, 40-42
Little Flower - 3/23/14

My Brothers and Sisters,

If you have been reading your *Little Black Book*, you may remember that last Sunday you were asked to choose which word best describes Lent. The five choices were: 1) ashes, 2) baptism, 3) fast and abstinence, 4) the Passion of Our Lord, or 5) giving things up. The correct answer was baptism. Lent is the time of final preparation for those preparing to enter the Church at the Easter Vigil. For those of us who are already members of the Church, Lent is the time of final preparation for the renewal of our Baptismal promises at Easter.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that if she had asked him for water, he would have given her living water. He goes on to contrast the physical water from the well with the living water he would give 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."*

Water, of course, is the primary symbol of baptism. We use water for washing. We believe that the waters of baptism wash away original sin. Flowing water is a symbol of life. Because Jesus lived in an arid land, he could not have chosen a better symbol for baptism. In an arid land, water means the difference between life and death as is clear from today's reading from Exodus. In effect, Jesus was saying that the waters of baptism are as important to eternal life as physical water is to physical life.

Fr. Edward Schillebeeckx, a Belgian Dominican, wrote a book entitled *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*. There probably is no story in the Gospels that better exemplifies Christ as the sacrament of the encounter with God than the story of the Samaritan woman at the well.

Jesus' encounter with the woman was dramatic, intimate, and life changing. First, it was dramatic. Jesus asked the woman for water, seemingly a simple request. However, the woman was surprised that Jesus asked her for water since *"Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans."* Even less would Jewish men talk with Samaritan women. When his disciples returned, even they were amazed that he was talking with a woman.

Second, the encounter was intimate. Jesus revealed God to her and revealed her to herself. He revealed himself as the Messiah, the Christ, the gift of God, the giver of life-giving water rising up to eternal life. At the same time, Jesus revealed the woman to herself when he talked with her about her multiple marriages.

Third, because Jesus spoke heart to heart with the Samaritan woman, the encounter was life changing for her. Her encounter with Jesus brought her to conversion of heart. We have to believe that from that day forward she believed in Jesus. We have to believe that from that day forward she worshiped God in spirit and in truth. We know from the story that she shared the Good News of Jesus with others.

Finally, my brothers and sisters, today's Gospel sparks a question we might ask ourselves: "What are we thirsting for?" Most of us have already discovered that the things we thought we were thirsting for have not satisfied our thirst: money, possessions, power, prestige, pleasure, knowledge, education, career, job, and even relationships. Today's second reading suggests our deepest thirst. We are thirsting for the Holy Spirit, God's love, to be poured into our hearts. Today's second reading offers the most powerful proof of God's love for us. Paul wrote, *"What proves God's love for us is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners."*