

Commentary on the Readings for March 19, 2017

The Third Sunday in Lent

In the Readings for *today*, we have a couple of stories that contain the biblical symbol of water. Throughout the Bible there are many passages that use this symbol which represents various at-tributes of God, mostly the power and guidance of the **Holy Spirit**. Let us look beyond the obvious uses or needs for water and try to see the gift of "*living water*" that God holds out to each of us every day.

In the **First Reading** from the *Book of Exodus (17:3-7)*, the Israelites are grumbling about the lack of fresh water. They threaten Moses with stoning and even want to go back to Egypt. Even after seeing what God did for them in freeing them from slavery in Egypt, they still complain rather than praying with patience and expectation for the Lord to continue to help them. God does provide the necessary water in abundance and in a miraculous way. However, God would like to do more and give more but they do not ask because their faith is weak.

The **Responsorial Psalm (95:1- 9)** is a meditation on the above scene from Exodus, and it is what the Israelites should have been saying or praying rather than grumbling. They should have acknowledged "*...we are the people He shepherds; the flock He guides.*" If true, will He not provide what is necessary for His flock?

In the **Second Reading** from St. Paul's *Letter to the Romans (5:1-8)*, Paul realizes that the "water" that the Israelites wanted and the woman at the well wants and needs is, in reality, "the love of God that has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit." We who are baptized in and through Jesus Christ have a spring of living water within us waiting to be tapped and yet, many of us do not realize it or make use of it.

The **Gospel Reading** is from the *Gospel of John (4:5-42)*. In this reading we hear the familiar story of the woman at Jacob's well. Don't pass this over like so many stories that we have heard so frequently that we don't listen. The woman comes to the well for earthly water. She comes with an empty water jar, a symbol of an empty soul. The conversation between Jesus, a Jew, and the woman, a Samaritan, is engaging for many reasons. Jesus asks her to give Him a small part of herself (her efforts) and in return He promises to give unending "*living water*," a gift of the Holy Spirit. The woman is so taken with what Jesus is telling her that she runs off, leaving her water jar and calls her neighbors to come and listen to the man "*who knows all about her.*"

When you come to Mass, whether it is on Sunday or any day, what do you bring to give Our Lord? He holds out to you living water, the Holy Spirit, eternal life and His own flesh and blood to nourish your soul and spirit. So what do you give Him in return? Like the Israelites in the desert, don't miss this opportunity to get more than you can imagine. When you come to Mass along with love and prayers, bring your hurts, your disappointments, and troubles and have them washed away with this living water that flows freely from the altar. Something to think about during your Prayer Time this week!

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