

Dominica III Quadragesimae A

Lectio Divina by Fr. Randy Soto

I. Lectio

A. Theme of the day: **Baptism is the water of life eternal**

- 1st Water in the Desert
- 2nd The Holy Spirit poured out into our hearts
- Gospel The Living waters of Jesus (Samaritan Woman)

B. We read in the Book of Exodus this episode in which the people of Israel put *YHWH* to the test while wandering through the desert. Exodus 14 describes the mighty deeds operated by the Lord to liberate Israel from Egypt; chapter 15 is dedicated to narrate the songs of victory used by Moses and the people to celebrate their freedom and to thank *YHWH* for it; chapters 16 and 17 come as a surprise to the reader because they narrate how quickly Israel forgot that God is in charge and that he is capable to provide and not just to liberate. So they murmured and tested the Lord over and over: quails, manna in c 16; water and war in 17. Today's episode is located what is called today *Wadi-Refayid*. The people begin to suffer from the toll of the desert, thirst! There is no water for them to drink, they fear they are going to die and they take it upon Moses and upon the Lord. Moses appealed to the Lord for help and He instructs Moses to strike the rock in order that water may spring-forth: "*You shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it.*" Water is life in the desert and so God teaches Israel that he has the power to give life wherever. Moses called that place: Meribah (= contention) as a reminder of Israel's contempt; and *Massah* (= trial) for putting God to the test.

C. This desert episode left a mark in the mind of Israel, so it is not surprising that even the Temple Liturgy echoed it in Ps 94. The Church in her wisdom has chosen this Psalm for the Invitatory to begin every liturgical day. We are called to surrender our lives to God's care and not to imitate the hardness of heart Israel manifested in the desert: "*If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.*"

D. Romans is best known to be a Baptismal Homily in which Paul explains the necessity of being regenerated in the waters of Baptism in order to obtain life everlasting. Paul uses a rhetorical device called *sorites* (a catena of syllogisms) to instill in his listeners that Christian Hope derives from the gift of the Holy Spirit which, like *water*, has been poured within our hearts on the very day of our Baptism: "*The love of God has been poured out within our hearts.*"

E. The symbol of water in John's Gospel is perhaps the most sophisticated of the Evangelist's motifs. Water is used repeatedly to tie together significant episodes in the Gospel that signal a coming to faith in the lives of the characters that the author wanted to portray. This use of water as a symbol in the Old Testament seems to foreshadowing its powerful use in the Gospel of John as a symbol of rebirth: 1:26,31,33; 2:7,9(2x); 3:5,23; 4:7,10,11,13,14(3x),15,46; 5:4(2x),7; 7:38; 13:5; 19:34.

F. For the Rabbinic tradition, Torah is like water that cleanses, quenches thirst and gives life. John uses this knowledge to build upon it his Christological motif: Jesus reveals himself to this Samaritan woman as the (*he pegé*) living waters springing-forth life eternal in contrast to the stagnant waters of Jacob's well (*to phréar*) in the Old Testament.

III. *Meditatio*

A. Today we begin what was once called the Johannine Lent, for from this Sunday forth; the Gospel readings are taken from John.

B. Water in Genesis becomes the instrument through which God creates life (Gen 1:2). It is his very act of separating the waters what makes life a reality (Gen 1:7). Water also is the purging instrument with which God cleanses all evil from humanity, for in the Flood water washes out all sinners and only those in the ark are saved (Gen 7:17-8:22). Through the waters of the Red Sea, Moses, the one rescued from the waters, led Israel into freedom (Ex 14). Elijah prayed seven times so that God could send the rain (1Kgs 17:1-6.41-46). Ezekiel had a vision of the living waters emanating from the Temple (Eze 47:1-12). In the book of Revelation we read that the New Jerusalem is surrounded life-flowing River (Rev 22:1ff).

C. The use of water in the sacrament of Baptism makes evident the reality of God's power to giving life where there is none and of the power to regenerating life when it had been lost or stained by sin. Are we mindful of this reality, when we use Holy Water and make the Sign of the Cross as we enter or leave Church? Have we asked Jesus, like the Samaritan Woman, to give us from his life-giving waters?

D. The waters of Baptism wash away our sins and bestow upon us the Theological virtues of Faith Hope and Love. These virtues will help us to be docile and not obstinate in God's presence. "*If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts*" is the mantra for the day. May God help us to make it become a reality so that we too may drink of the Waters offered by Jesus in the Gospel.

III. *Oratio*

We begin our celebration by quoting from Ps 25: "*My eyes are ever fixed on the Lord, for he releases my feet from the snare, O look at me and be merciful, for I am wretched and alone*" (EA). Our three Lenten practices are of great assistance in moments of despair: *Father, you have taught us to overcome our sins by prayer, fasting and works of mercy. When we are discouraged by our weakness, give us confidence in your love*" (OP); we know that God wants us to forgive everyone before we offer sacrifice, so we pray: "*Lord, by the grace of this sacrifice may we who ask forgiveness be ready to forgive one another*" (PG). Today's preface helps us to apply the teachings of today's Gospel in our daily lives: "*When he asked the woman of Samaria for water to drink, Christ had already prepared for her the gift of faith. In his thirst to receive her faith he awakened in her the fire of our love.*" (Preface). At

communion while receiving the Eucharist we echo Jesus voice in the Gospel: *"Whoever drinks the water that I shall give him, says the Lord, will have a spring inside him, welling up for eternal life"* (CA). We conclude our celebration reiterating our need of forgiveness, unity and peace: *"In sharing this sacrament may we receive your forgiveness and be brought together in unity and peace."*

III. Contemplatio

A. *"Our Lord came to the fountain of water like a hunter. He asked for water so that he might give water; under the pretext of water. He asked for a drink, like someone who was thirsty, so that the gateway to quenching thirst might be opened to him. He asked a request of the woman so that he might teach her and that she in turn might make a request of him. Although rich, the Lord was not ashamed to make a request like a person in need, so that he might teach indigence how to make a request. He cast a bait for the dove so that through it he might capture the entire flock. He made a request of her obliquely so that she might respond directly"* **St. Ephraem the Syrian.**

B. Today in many parishes, the catechumens of the **RCIA** receive their *First Scrutiny*, let us be mindful that they are preparing to receive the gift of Baptism during the Easter vigil and accompany them with our sacrifices and prayers, particularly during this Third Sunday of Lent.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

1. That, like the woman of Samaria, our elect may review their lives before Christ and acknowledge their sins...
2. That they may be freed from the spirit of mistrust that deters people from following Christ...
3. That, while awaiting the gift of God, they may long with all their hearts for the living water that brings eternal life...
4. That, by accepting the Son of God as their teacher, they may become true worshipers of the Father in spirit and in truth...
5. That they may share with their friends and neighbors the wonder of their own meeting with Christ...

PRAYER OF EXORCISM A

God of power, you sent your Son to be our Savior. Grant that these catechumens, who, **like the woman of Samaria, thirst for living water**, may turn to the Lord as they hear his word and acknowledge the sins and weaknesses that weigh them down. Protect them from vain reliance on self and defend them from the power of Satan. Free them from the spirit of deceit, so that, admitting the wrong they have done, they may attain purity of heart and advance on the way to salvation."

Lord Jesus, you are the **fountain for which they thirst**, you are the Master they seek. In your presence, they dare not claim to be without sin, for you alone are the Holy One of God. They open their hearts to you in faith and confess their faults and lay bare their hidden wounds. In your love free them from their infirmities, heal their sickness, **quench their thirst**, and give them peace. In the power of your name, which we call upon in faith, stand by them now and heal them. Rule over the spirit of evil, conquered by your rising from the dead."