

Sermon for the Third Sunday in Lent: March 12, 2023 jj

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First they came on TV as infomercials – advertising video segments that could run from 5 minutes to an hour or more that try to convince you their product is the most amazing thing to come along ever, that it slices and dices and makes you look “years younger” – and that you just can’t live without it. Now it seems everyone is jumping on board with YouTube and TikTok advertising themselves or something they do and many hundreds, even thousands of people watch and dream that they could be as energetic, creative, enthusiastic or as good looking as those people they’re watching! So many are buying what they’re selling. It’s worth giving it a try, right?

Of course, don’t we all know from experience that we really didn’t need those things nearly as much as the advertisers claim? We know our lives cannot change so drastically that we can possibly live the same way as the videos that bombard our computers and phones. But having said that, I think it’s safe to say that there is something we each have a very deep need for – even though we don’t always admit it for what it is. That’s the thirst we all feel deep down inside our souls for the righteousness and forgiveness of God. The problem, however, is that by nature we’d prefer not to recognize this great need. Often we don’t feel spiritually thirsty, and so God constantly needs to “advertise” that fact to us, you could say, so that we might realize our soul’s desperately dehydrated condition.

That advertisement comes to you today as you hear the Samaritan woman’s thirst for “Living Water” in response to Jesus’ words: “Whoever drinks of this plain, ordinary water will thirst again. But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst again. The water that I give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” Now,

if like the woman at the well, you think Jesus is speaking of the type of drink that will soothe your physical pain and satisfy your earthly appetite, then you’ve misunderstood the “advertisement.” For this is another type of drink entirely. This drink satisfies the guilt of your sin, absorbs it in fact. It quenches all your worries about God’s wrath and punishment, your accusations that the Lord dealt you a bad hand in life, and it refreshes you with the promise of eternal joy and resurrection in Christ our Lord.

As the Samaritan woman would soon learn, this water would completely change her life and make her a child of God. That’s why Jesus had to “advertise” it to her – because she was looking only for something to address her day-to-day needs. She was hoping to get the kind of water necessary for normal drinking, cooking and cleaning – as opposed to the kind of Living Water Christ was offering! But are you any different? Don’t you tend to see your needs only in terms of your own immediate wants and desires? For instance, on many occasions your need for a sufficient, regular paycheck might seem more important than your need for forgiveness. A peaceful weekend might seem more precious at times than coming to God’s House and receiving His true peace. Your lunch and dinner table might look more inviting than the Lord’s Supper. Recreation and leisure time might have a higher priority in your life than worship. So, today Jesus is “advertising” to each one of you concerning the need you have for His “Living Water” gifts – for indeed, all of us are spiritually dehydrated, whether we feel it or not.

If you’ve ever spent any time in the Desert Southwest, one of the things you’ll quickly learn is that you have to drink lots and lots of liquid – even though you might not feel your

thirst initially. So, the rule to follow is this: Even though you might not feel thirsty, you have to assume that you are. And that same rule applies to your spiritual thirst. It doesn't matter how much you think you need God's forgiveness and righteousness, the truth is, you always need it. Without it you'll trudge through this life's desert until finally you collapse and fall headlong into the endless heat of hell's fiery oven.

Like the woman at the well, you also live in the desert of your sins. Though you may not know it, because of the sin that sticks to your human nature, you are spiritually parched and about to collapse – that is, until God comes to your rescue. First He shows you how thirsty you are when He preaches His Law to you. God's Law clearly demonstrates and advertises what you've done and not done – how you haven't kept His Commandments, haven't shown love for either God or your neighbor, but rather hurt them in a way they can feel or you've done it behind their backs. The holy Law also reveals the perfect life you haven't lived – all of which demonstrates beyond any shadow of doubt how dried-out and shriveled-up you are without Jesus.

Then, Christ fills you with His “Living Water” by creating faith in your heart, so that you believe in the promises of the Gospel. In the “Living Water” of Holy Baptism, God has given you new life – and re-hydrated your thirsty soul by the power of the Holy Spirit working through water and the Word – and without this we most certainly would have perished eternally.

As Jesus says in other places, this “Living Water” is no magic potion on TV or a special product that only a chosen few subscribers are to receive. Actually it's something we're all quite familiar with – it's the Holy Spirit. And when you pray in the Lord's Prayer, “Thy Kingdom Come,” the Catechism reminds you that God's Kingdom comes when Jesus gives you His Holy Spirit. In today's Gospel story,

Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that she needs this “Living Water” – because for salvation and eternal life it is absolutely essential. You need the Holy Spirit because, just as your body needs water to live, so likewise your soul needs the Holy Spirit, who connects you to Jesus. It's impossible to understand God's Word without the help and aid of the Holy Spirit. The Sacraments can do nothing to create or sustain faith within you without the Spirit's presence and power that is in God's Word. The nutrients you need to live a Godly life in response to that faith cannot be channeled into your heart were it not for the work of the Spirit acting as the “Agent” through whom the benefits of these gracious gifts of God are delivered to you.

Consider also how necessary water is for the cleansing of your blood, and for the elimination of harmful wastes. So also then God's “Living Water” is required in order that your soul might be cleansed and the harmful wastes of your old sinful nature eliminated. Through Baptism you've been washed clean of your sin – and by daily remembrance of your Baptism, the Holy Spirit is continually at work – daily ridding you of sin and death. In Baptism your Old Adam has been crucified with Christ, so that the body of sin might be done away with. Christ's death has become your death, and Christ's life becomes your life – so that more and more – every day – your life might continue to be molded to the life of our Savior.

Think about how water cools the body and maintains a proper operating temperature. In like manner, the Holy Spirit also cools and comforts you during trials and temptations – even though the devil may be attacking you and trying to destroy your faith. It's the Holy Spirit who keeps your faith strong during the struggles of sickness, death of loved ones, conflict, doubt, despair and other difficult times. Through all of these the Holy Spirit comforts and cools you by reminding you of the Lord's power to protect and preserve you in any situation of life. It's the Spirit who directs you to God's promises in

Christ – and He alone is the Source of all comfort and hope.

Finally, water is what causes you to be able to breathe in the breath of life. Without the right amount of moisture in your lungs, the proper exchange of oxygen can't take place. Perhaps that's parallel to how the Holy Spirit works in prayer – since prayer is the “vital breath” of the Christian. In spite of the fact that you don't always know what to pray for, the Spirit Himself is always interceding for you with groanings that are too deep for words. He makes intercession, a specific request to the Father, for all the saints on earth according to the will of God. Even when you don't know what you need – you can still be certain that the Holy Spirit is automatically breathing His prayers for you before God's throne – both to keep your faith alive, and to make your needs known to God.

Without the “Living Water” of the Holy Spirit, your faith would quickly suffocate, your soul would shrivel up and die, there'd be no life in you at all – only eternal death! But the Good News for you this morning is that Christ gives this “Living Water,” freely and abundantly. He does not use a quick-paced voice to rattle off an indiscernible disclaimer, nor does He put conditions on it like some people will tell you. Conditions like, before you receive the Holy Spirit, first you must do something, whether you “surrender your life to Him,” or “empty your spirit,” or “obey Him totally”—things like this force you with the Law to come to God first. But Jesus says: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, I am the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.” Christ has already given you His “Living Water” like a fountain that springs up into everlasting life. It is here before you today to drink deeply, so that in heaven you will finally see and experience what a priceless blessing it really is.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.