

Third Sunday in Lent, Cycle A
Exodus 17: 3-7
Psalm 95: 1-2, 6-7, 8-9
Romans 5: 1-2, 5-8
John 4: 5-42
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If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

The woman at the well thought she was hard-hearted. She was level-headed and unsentimental. She'd been around, and knew the score. She knew what mattered -- practical things like security, sons, flocks, water -- and a bucket to reach it with. No spiritual snake oil salesman was likely to put anything over on her.

Then Jesus came along. He sat down at the well to rest, and said to her, "Give me a drink." She was shocked. It was impossible that a Jewish man should speak to a Samaritan woman, let alone drink from a Samaritan bucket. Things like this just didn't happen. Jesus had her off-balance already. She began to be fascinated by him.

And then Jesus began to speak to her of "living water." If you drank it you would never be thirsty again. It would become a fountain within you, and spring up to provide eternal life. And suddenly a profound yearning broke through the woman's pragmatism. Something in her stony heart cried out for this wonderful water.

Of course she kidded herself that she wanted the miraculous water for a practical reason: "Give me this water, sir, so that I won't grow thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." Now, instead of immediately responding to her request, Jesus disconcerts her further. He pushes her over the brink into belief by telling her "everything she ever

did." And in a moment her heart was his, and by her testimony, many came to believe in him.

The yearning for living water that Jesus uncovered in the Samaritan woman, is present in every human heart, though in some of us, as in her, it lies dormant, and has to be activated by God's grace. And no matter whether we are pragmatists or romantics, lovers or fighters, no matter how hard-hearted we think we are, Christ will somehow manage to trigger that thirst in each of us.

Its a thirst, instilled in us by our Creator, as part of the standard equipment of every human being: a kind of built-in homing device that doesn't allow us to rest, until we return to the Lord. It is a yearning for love, perfection, meaning, eternity, fulfillment. In short, its a craving for God: a thirst that can be quenched only in the way described by St. Paul when he writes, "the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit."

Lent is a time for reflection; a time for us to be honest with ourselves. We need to admit that we are thirsty, and that we have been trying to quench our thirst with things that are not God. Its a time for us to see the futility of these efforts, and to come back to the living water -
- to come back to Christ.

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