

## HOMILY for 3<sup>rd</sup> SUNDAY of LENT – Year A

This Sunday's Gospel talks about the story of the Samaritan woman at the well & Jesus as well as water & bucket. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

A New York retail clerk was suffering from aching feet. "It's all those years of standing," his doctor declared. "You need a vacation. Go to Miami, soak your feet in the ocean & you'll feel better."

When the man got to Florida, he went into a hardware store, bought two large buckets & headed for the beach. "How much for two buckets of that sea water?" he asked the lifeguard.

"A dollar a bucket," the fellow replied with a straight face.

The clerk paid him, filled his buckets, went to his hotel room & soaked his feet. They felt so much better; so, he decided to repeat the treatment that afternoon. Again he handed the lifeguard two dollars. The young man took the money and said, "Help yourself."

The clerk started for the water, then stopped in amazement. The tide was out, "Wow," he said, turning to the lifeguard. "Some business you got here!"

Anyway, last Sunday, we were told that Jesus took three of His disciples up to Mount Tabor to have a divine encounter & find enough spiritual strength to complete their journey with Him. He invited us to spend some time this Lent in prayer with Him on the holy mountain & find the same spiritual strength & divine experience like those disciples. However, we have not learned much about the spiritual strength that Jesus would want His disciples to have within them if they wish to complete the journey of the Cross. Believe it or not, this Sunday's Gospel gives us a remarkable revelation about that spiritual strength through the image of the well on a hot summer day.

Before discussing about the image of the well & spiritual strength, I'd like to examine the vital role of water in our lives. Here is how this Sunday's First Reading tells us about the important role of water in our daily life, "In their thirst for water, the people grumbled against Moses, saying, 'why did you ever make us leave Egypt? Was it just to have us die here of thirst with our children & our livestock.'... The Lord answered Moses, 'Go over there in front of the people, along with some of the elders of Israel; holding in your hand, as you go, the staff with which you struck the river. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock in Horeb. Strike the rock, & the water will flow from it for the people to drink.'" As you can see, the people of God grumbled against Moses & demanded him to give them water. Otherwise, they would die of thirst in the desert. In case you do not know, water is the hottest commodity under the hot sun in the desert. A human being could not survive in the desert without water. In fact, a person could survive without eating any food for several weeks. But, a man has to drink at least fifteen cups or 3.5 liters of water a day; and a woman eleven cups or 2.5 liters of water a day. Hence, a person cannot survive without water for more than three days. We can see why water is so vital for our daily survival.

I had personally experienced the vital role of water when escaping by boat out of the Communist Viet Nam. After the end of the Viet Nam War, the Vietnamese had to suffer painfully from the lack of food & daily supplies like any country that is under the economic embargo and sanction of the Western world. But, the worst part in those dark days under the Communist regime was the scarcity of water. I remembered looking at the main faucet of our home dripping with water & wondered how long it might take to fill up a small bucket; the answer is the whole day! That is why most Vietnamese would try to collect rain water or get water from a neighborhood well every day for daily consumption. Hence, the well became a public place for the whole neighborhood to gather & socialize. All the kids would come there to take shower & play every day.

I had to figure out when would be the best time to get water from the well & avoid the big crowd. I recalled the water level of the well did go way down at times due to the over-usage of it by the public. When I traveled to the southern US border & went across to the northern part of Mexico to experience the daily living condition of the poorest in the Mexican society as part of the seminary training, I had the first-hand look at how valuable water was to this community. These folks lived along the border; and their homes were just a bunch of rickety shacks made out of all kinds of materials, even cardboards. Every few days a public water truck would drive through to distribute water to the community. I recall that I was given just a small cup of water a day to brush my teeth & wash my face while staying there. However, the vital role of water in our daily life & its scarcity did not sink in for me until the moment I escaped from Viet Nam while our rickety boat was floating in the middle of Pacific Ocean under the hot sun for over a week. I was allowed to have only half of a small cup of water to last for the whole day. I recalled how much I dreamt to have a little more water to drink in the boat, especially the ice-cold water. That is why I thought I was in Heaven after our boat was rescued by a South Korean tanker; & we were given cold water to quench our thirst. The sweet cold water flowed down my dry throat; & I could feel how refreshing it was to my entire body. My thirsty body was refreshed & given an amazing source of energy to bring it back to life.

The Samaritan woman was looking for the same thing when she came to the local well every day to get water & search for the refreshment & livelihood for her body. Here is how this Sunday's Gospel tells us about her daily task, "Jesus had passed through Samaria, & His journey brought Him to a Samaritan town... This was the site of Jacob's well... The hour was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' The Samaritan said to Him, 'You are a Jew. How can you ask me, a Samaritan & a woman, for a drink?' (Recall that Jews have nothing to do with Samaritans.) Jesus replied: 'If only you recognized God's gifts, & who would have given you for a drink, you would have asked Him instead, & He would have given you living water.'...He continued: 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. But, whoever drinks the water I give him will never be thirsty; no, the water I give shall become a fountain within him/her leaping up to provide eternal life.' The woman said to Him, 'Give me this water, sir, so that I will not grow thirsty & have to keep coming here to draw water.'"

Evidently the Samaritan woman met Jesus at the local well & found out that He could give her a source of water that would quench her thirst for a long time & eventually lead her to the eternal life. This water source that Jesus would give to the Samaritan woman & the whole world would help us take care not only our life here on earth but also the eternal life. That is why we Catholics have come here every Sunday to search for the spiritual nourishment in the Holy Eucharist. We believe that the spiritual well of the Holy Eucharist will refresh our current life & eventually bring us to the eternal life.

My dear brothers & sisters, the Samaritan woman in today's Gospel gave us a wise advice when she asked Jesus for the spiritual nourishment to replace the well water. We should do the same this Lent & search for spiritual nourishment. That way we would have enough spiritual strength to complete our journey of the Cross with Jesus & come to celebrate not only the Easter miracle but also the eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven someday. That is the amazing power & awesome potential of the spiritual nourishment for us Christians to focus on this Lent.