

Homily of Third Sunday of Lent of Year A, 2023

Exodus 17:3-7; Psalm 95:1-2, 6-9; Romans 5:1-2, 5-8; John 4:5-42

In the first reading, the Israelites thirsted for water as they journeyed in the desert. In their difficulty, they did not cry to God. Rather, they grumbled against Moses.

Sometimes, our life's journey can be without 'water' like the Israelites in the desert. Do we do the same as the Israelites, grumble against one another, blame one another, and fight one another; instead of coming together, reasoning together, working together, and praying together for God's intervention, guidance, and direction? When the people grumbled, nothing happened. But when Moses cried to God in prayer, something happened. This event teaches us a good lesson about the power of prayer.

God directed Moses to strike the rock with the miracle staff in his hand. He did, and water flowed from the rock for the people. The solution was in Moses' hand, but he did not know it. The solution to our problem may be right before us. We need to always pray for God's divine guidance and direction.

Many times, God brings solutions through unexpected and unlikely means. Probably, the expectation of the people was a rain fall or finding a cistern anywhere nearby for them to have some water. Rather, God made water flow from rock. Our God is a God of surprises.

St. Paul encourages us in the second reading that we will never be disappointed if we have unshaken faith and hope in Jesus Christ. Such faith and hope bring about the outpouring of God's love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Such outpouring by the Holy Spirit is empowering and uplifting, and makes us radiate with joy no matter the extent of the problem. It makes us not to be consumed by the hard times we are going through. With such faith and hope, there is no space for grumbling. Rather, we look up to our faithful God.

In the Gospel, the Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water. At the well she met Jesus.

The woman was wounded in many ways. She carried racial wound. We read: "Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.'" She immediately voiced out her racial wound, "'How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?' For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans." At that time, the Jews despised the Samaritans and claimed superiority over them. But Jesus reached out to the Samaritan woman in order to break down the racial gully between the Jews and the Gentiles.

Another wound the Samaritan woman carried was that she had had five husbands and was at that moment cohabiting with a man. We do not know her past life with the five men, but we can conclude that it would have been very tough for her. One husband is tough enough, how much more are five!

From all indications, the Samaritan woman was a frustrated, disappointed, unstable, isolated, dejected, and humiliated person. Her wounded and depressed life can be seen in her actions. She came to draw water alone, and at noon, at an hour she would meet nobody. People, usually, fetch water in the morning and in the evening, hardly in the middle of the day. It was also strange, at that time, for a woman to go anywhere all alone, not in a company of other women. Although the woman came to draw water, Jesus saw that she needed healing and salvation much more than ordinary water.

The Samaritan woman was healed, liberated, and transformed. Her deliverance had immediate effect. The isolated and depressed woman radiated with joy. She became a witness and an evangelizer. As we read, she left her jar (showing us that water was not really her problem) and hurried into the town and testified her experience to her people. Many followed her to see Jesus and began to believe in him. On their invitation, Jesus stayed two days with them preaching to them. "They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world.'"

There are many people who are dried up like Israelites in the desert or depressed like the Samaritan woman. As we celebrate this Eucharist, we are at the well and Jesus is meeting us. Prophet Isaiah 12:3 assures us, "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." As water flowed from the rock in the desert, so also God's graces flow from this sanctuary, which is our spiritual rock, as we celebrate this Eucharist. Isaiah 55:1 invites us, "All you who are thirsty, come to the waters ... without money and without cost." Psalm 34:18-21 assures us, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those whose spirit is crushed. Many are the troubles of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him from them all. He watches over all their bones; not one of them shall be broken." Psalm 147: 3 says, "He heals the brokenhearted and binds their wounds."

May God heal our brokenness and wounds. May our testimonies of answered prayers bring many to rejoice with us and in turn believe in the saving power of God. Amen.

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