

Homily of Third Sunday of Lent of Year A

In the first reading, the Israelites journeying in the desert thirsted for water. God directed Moses to strike the rock with his staff to provide water for the people. Sometimes, our life's journey can be like the Israelites in the desert without water. The Israelites, in their difficulty, did not cry to God, rather they grumbled against Moses. We do the same. There is a problem, we grumble against one another, we blame one another, and fight one another; instead of coming together, reasoning together, and praying together for God's intervention and inspiration. When the people grumbled, nothing happened.



But when Moses cried to God, something happened. God does not respond to our grumbling. He responds to our prayers. God directed Moses to strike the rock with the miracle staff in his hand. Meanwhile the solution was in Moses' hand but he did not know it. The solution to our problem may be right before us. All we need is God's divine inspiration and direction. That is why prayer is absolutely important. May God inspire and direct us, as he inspired and directed Moses. Amen. Many times, God brings solution from the most unexpected places and with unexpected instruments. Probably the expectation was a rain fall for the people to have water. Rather, God made water flow from rock. God, many times uses the most unexpected means. He is God of surprises. Sometimes my prayer is, "God give me a surprise." Often, he does.

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.'" The woman replied, "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans." Jews and Samaritans despised the other. The Jews claimed superiority, and saw the Samaritans as not like them. But Jesus did not mind that she was a Samaritan. He reached out to her breaking through the racial barriers that existed at that time. Another wound she carried was that she had had five marriages and by then living with a boyfriend. We do not know what happened to the marriages but we can conclude that it was very tough for her. One marriage is enough trouble, not to talk of five. From all indications, the Samaritan woman was frustrated, disappointed, unstable, isolated, rejected person, filled with shame. Her isolated and lonely life can be seen in her action. She came to draw water alone, and at noon, at an hour she would meet no body. 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 story of redemption did not end with the Samaritan woman. As we read, the women left her jar and hurried with joy into the town and called the people, and the people followed her to see Jesus. She was healed. She was liberated. She was transformed. She became a witness and an evangelizer. The isolated and depressed woman radiated with joy and her testimony drew a crowd to Jesus.

The second reading says that we are justified by faith. Therefore, we need to have hope, because hope does not disappoint. The second reading teaches us that God pours his love upon those who have faith and hope through the Holy Spirit. Such love is empowering and uplifting, no matter the extent of the problem. Sometimes, a person is going through hard times, but the person is not consumed by the hard times. The person radiates with joy. People ask, "What is the magic?" The person's joy comes from the outpouring of love from God through the Holy Spirit. That is the power of faith and hope.

There are many people today in the situation of the Israelites in the desert and of the Samaritan woman. As we celebrate this Mass, 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." Isaiah 55:1 says to us, "All you who are thirsty, come to the water." Psalm 34:19-21 assures us, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted, 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 with the water of salvation. Amen.

Stop grumbling and spend that time in prayer. Prayer is the key. God responds to our prayers not our grumbling. Remember, when the Israelites grumbled, nothing happened. But when Moses cried to the Lord, there was miracle. Pray for the type of blessing the Samaritan woman received: healing, liberation and transformation. Pray that your testimony of answered prayers will bring many to rejoice with you and in turn believe in Jesus. Amen.

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