

HOMILY

The Third Sunday of Lent *February 24, 2008*

Rev. Andrew A. Czajkowski

**St. John the Evangelist Parish
Davison, Michigan**

It was Erik Erikson, the great psychologist, who said every person is forced to deal with three critical issues in his or her life's journey:

1. The Crisis of *Identity* – *Who am I?*
2. The Crisis of *Influence* – *Whose am I?*
3. The Crisis of *Integrity* – *How am I?*

I would like to add one additional critical issue that must be addressed:

What am I thirsting for?

Have you ever been truly thirsty? I'm not referring to the "I could go for a Coke" type of thirst, but to the cracked lips, parched tongue, weak-in-the-knees, dizzy-in-the-head type of thirst that comes from going without water for an extended period of time. Those who have had such a thirst can easily summon up gratitude for water – especially abundant, drinkable water. For those who have not, it is important to realize that such thirst is a regular occurrence in our world.

If you travel to South Dakota, you might visit two parts of the western territory. The first region is known as The Badlands. It is a most appropriate name. There is little water there. The ground is literally cracked and baked by the sun. It thirsts for clean, refreshing water. Just about sixty miles away are the Black Hills, which feature some of the most beautiful land in all of God's creation. Here we see running brooks and streams, good fishing, great wildlife, marvelous trees. The hills are alive with life and music.

You can observe the same difference in people's spiritual lives. I have known that difference in my own spiritual life. We can see the difference in the world in which we live. With gentleness today, may I ask you: "What are you thirsting for

today? What is the one thirst that supercedes all other pursuits?" Thirst is a powerful human drive that insists of being satisfied.

The landscape of human history is cluttered with those who have thirsted for the wrong thing. Do the names Hitler and Stalin ring any bells? Is not the problem in the Holy Land between the Jews and the Palestinians, as well as the conflict in Iraq, the result of a misguided thirst? Think of the death, destruction and hatred that have resulted from the thirst for power and domination. God has one sketch for human life and Evil has another. How many people in everyday life have fallen because of the wrong thirsts? How many corporate leaders succumb to greed and immorality? We need to be reminded how seductive some of the claims for quenching our thirst can be. The Apostle Paul reminded us more than once that we are wrestling against something greater than flesh and blood. To take the road less traveled requires commitment, courage, and an informed consciousness about life.

So, in the midst of all this, what can we do? The first thing is to admit that we are thirsty – we need help. There is one group in our society that is honest enough to admit its need. They are honest enough to admit that they have thirsted for the wrong thing – the wrong beverage. That group is Alcoholics Anonymous. Perhaps we should have similar groups for the greedy, the slothful, the cynical, the selfish, the materialistic, and the narcissistic. More things than alcohol and drugs are used to intoxicate the human spirit.

The second thing is to recognize that this thirst was put there by God. When you feel an emptiness in your spirit, it is a warning that you are dry and parched. When it comes to the things that really matter, nothing else can slake this thirst but God. Remember St. Augustine? He tried all the world could offer him as a young man in a futile attempt to satisfy a yearning of his soul. It was one trivial pursuit after another. It was out of those experiences that Augustine eventually said, "Lord, our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee." It was out of the experience of deep-felt spiritual need that Augustine would conclude that each person has a heart with a God-shaped void – a hole or space which only God himself can fill.

Each of us has a thirst which only God can ultimately quench. We are created in the image of God. We are designed for a relationship that no other living creature on the face of the earth is privileged to have. There is a call and claim upon our lives which was placed in us before our birth.

Finally, we need to see that Christ can quench the thirsting in our soul. The woman at the well in today's Gospel discovered that in her life. That she is a Samaritan and a woman who has been married five times is not at issue. She is thirsting for something much more. Jesus offers the woman living water. Something completely different from the water in Jacob's Well. Imagine a spring of water, a fountain within us that never runs dry, gushing forth. How can she help but be intrigued? She is anxious for her thirst to be quenched. Leaving her water jar behind, but not the living water, she has been transformed by her encounter with Jesus.