

HOMILY

The Third Sunday of Lent

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She came without friends. She came at an hour when most of the other women of the town would not be present at the well. Perhaps she was alone because her reputation was jaded—going through five husbands and now living with a sixth, not even her husband. Jesus asked her for a drink of water. She was surprised that he would speak to her at all, relations between Jews and Samaritans being as hostile as they were. Jesus replied in a cryptic way, telling her of a “*living water which does not give out*” that he had and wished to offer. Though he is the one who asks for something to drink, she has a deeper thirst.

Where can we begin to find ourselves in this story?

All of us experience times of spiritual dryness when we know that life is not all that it could be. When we settle into grooved pathways of life that make our inner soul something like the pictures we see of the parched desert.

Much is written about the problem of stagnating seasons of life, when the well runs dry on the inside. Not so long ago, a person came to speak to me of their puzzlement over their spouse who has just seemed to lose their grip on life. What disturbs them most is not just their spouse’s outward indifference to their marriage, the family, the job; it is their inner listlessness of soul that gives them concern. The Medieval Church had a word for this ailment—*accidie* they called it in Latin. It means a sloth, a kind of drought of soul, a sort of “so what?” outlook that concludes that since nothing counts, anything goes. Values are held, but loosely, if at all. Life grows dull. Hope seems pointless. Love is just too much work.

What one doesn’t even realize under such a cover of spiritual dryness is that a thirst for life and worth and meaning under God is still there. It is to that dry, parched void of our life that Jesus brings us this astounding word of his. He,

himself, is the wellspring that never runs dry. A wellspring that keeps on gushing up in a living stream of life-giving water that continues into eternal life.

“*Sir, give me this life-giving water.*” She is in the early stages of belonging to someone of a faith that she never dreamed could be her own. Her life is no longer one day after another, back and forth to the well for water for that day. A parched soul has had life-giving water poured onto it. She is beginning to learn what it can mean to live from the wellspring of life which Christ Jesus is. That same experience is meant for us. Come to Jesus’ water. Trust him with your heart. Drink deeply at the wellspring of Jesus Christ.

I invite you to come here week after week to the living water of his word, to the living water of his sacrament—the Body and Blood of Christ—to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I invite you to the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday night, the 11th of April, so that like those who will be baptized you, too, will be refreshed in the waters of Jesus. Come, be made clean.

In C. S. Lewis’ great work, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, in *Book Four*, titled *The Silver Chair*, he tells the story of a young lass named Jill who finds herself in a far away land. She is lost, lonely and quite thirsty. She thinks she hears the gentle sound of a small stream nearby and follows the sound to its source. She finds the stream quickly, but there is a great lion named Aslan between it and her. Here is a hint—Aslan represents the Christ figure. Let us pick up the exchange between them:

“Are you not thirsty?” said the Lion.

“I’m dying of thirst,” said Jill.

“Then drink,” said the Lion.

“May I—could I—would you mind going away while I do” said Jill.

The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. And as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience. The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic.

“Will you promise not to—do anything to me, if I come?” said Jill.

“I make no promise,” said the Lion.

Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer.

“Do you eat girls?” she said.

“I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms,” said the Lion. It didn’t say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

“I dare not come and drink,” said Jill.

“Then you will die of thirst,” said the Lion.

“Oh, dear!” said Jill, coming another step nearer. “I suppose I must go and look for another stream then.”

“There is no other stream,” said the Lion.

It never occurred to Jill to disbelieve the Lion—no one who had seen his stern face could do that—and her mind suddenly made itself up. It was the worst thing she ever had to do, but she went forward to the stream, knelt down, and began scooping up water in her hand. It was the coldest, most refreshing water she had ever tasted.

Let me conclude with these words today: “**I THIRST.**”

My soul **THIRSTS** for God, for the living God. Jesus said to her, “*Everyone who drinks of this water will **THIRST** again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never **THIRST**, the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.*”

