

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent “We Hunger and Thirst for God”

Fr. Frank Schuster

What strange times we live in. The fact that the only way I can share the gospel with you this weekend is by talking to you over a video is very, very hard. As we all know, all public gatherings are canceled for the foreseeable future due to the coronavirus. And so, this is the only way I can share the Gospel with you this weekend. We are without a doubt joining the ancient Hebrews in the desert this season of Lent, journeying together into uncharted territory. And, along the way, like them, I imagine we are going to get really hungry and thirsty. I imagine for most of us this won't be for food or water given what I have been seeing in shopping carts lately at the store. However, as an aside, call it a public service announcement, before this is over some in our community might be actually have to deal with real physical hunger and thirst so please remember the food banks when you are filling up your grocery carts. However, I'll be honest with you, the hunger and thirst I am having right now is not about food, it is about not being able to celebrate Mass as a community with you this Sunday and my heart aches because of that. And yet, like you, I know it is for the best. It is for the best. As Church, we want to do our part to keep as many people healthy during this pandemic as we can. And so, here we are thanks to technology.

You know, when we think of biblical people who hunger and thirst, it is hard not to think about the Hebrews being led through the desert to the Promised Land. During that long journey, they often became hungry and thirsty. When they voiced their hunger to God, the Lord gave them bread from heaven. When they voiced their thirst to God, the Lord gave them life giving water from what was a lifeless rock. The name of the place in Exodus where Moses provides God's people with life giving water is very revealing. The place was called Massah and Meribah. The word Massah means “to test”. The word Meribah means “to quarrel”. The words together I believe articulate an anxious feeling of being unsatisfied and unsettled. The people of God were freed from slavery however they hadn't yet arrived at the Promised Land. They were in a desert, hungering and thirsting. They were not happy at all with the current state of their lives.

And clearly, I think you and I can relate a little bit with these Hebrews traveling in the desert to the Promised Land, especially this year. We are all traveling through this season of Lent together, to the Promised Land God has prepared for us. On this journey, we are going to get spiritually hungry too. We are going to get spiritually thirsty as well. God has given us bread from heaven in the Eucharist to nourish our souls. God has given us the life giving waters of baptism to quench our spiritual thirst. And yet, this season of Lent, we had to drain our font so that people don't accidentally share Covid 19 with someone and we can't be together around the altar as we normally do.

I believe this Lent above all Lents, we are coming to realize that attending to our physical hungers and thirsts are not going to be enough. We are coming to realize in a new way the spiritual hungers and thirsts we have as well. I wonder if the coming weeks might very well feel like a drudgery at times, like a slow plod, like a desert, a place where we are anxious, unsatisfied and unsettled, a place where we might get tempted try to fill that God shaped hole in our hearts

with all the things that fail to satisfy, a place where we might even quarrel with God, a place of hunger and thirst.

Jesus meets such a soul at the well in Samaria in our Gospel reading. At the outset, we know that there is no one on the planet more alienated or alone than this woman at the well. Notice that she doesn't even have a name! I like pointing that out. Perhaps the evangelist is inviting us to see ourselves in this woman for a moment or perhaps she is so isolated and alone that she doesn't even have a name. We know that she is a Samaritan. Samaritans were considered to be outcasts by Jesus' people, the Jews of his day. Samaritans were considered to be apostates, heretics, and despised by God. No good Jew of Jesus' day would ever have a conversation with a Samaritan. And Samaritans felt the same way about Jews. And notice the barrier there, a barrier that took centuries of cultural intolerance to construct.

Secondly, men never approached or talked with women alone in Jesus' day. This would have been understood to be disrespectful of the woman's family, yet another barrier between Jesus and this soul whose faith he thirsts for.

Thirdly, this woman was alone. Women never went to the well alone. They went in groups in the morning because going to the well was a social time and it was cool in the morning. The Gospel says the woman was at the well at noon time, the hottest time during the day in Samaria, 100 degrees or better probably. The woman was at the well alone at the worst time of the day, why?

This woman was a prostitute. This woman was suffering from the effects of her own sinfulness and the violence of other people's sinful behavior towards her. She was a victim of the violence of sin. My friends, I can't think of anyone more alienated or alone than this woman at the well. Can you? Can you imagine anyone more spiritually hungry or thirsty than this person? Can you imagine anyone who could be more unsettled or unsatisfied with her life?

What does Jesus do? Does Jesus allow culture or even religion to block his way to healing this woman? No. Does Jesus allow social barriers to block his way? No. Does Jesus allow our pride to block his way? No. Does Jesus allow even the evil of sin to block his way? No.

My friends, look at every wall that was standing between Jesus and this woman at the beginning of this story! And these were very big walls, some that took a lifetime to build, others that took centuries of intolerance to construct. Look how Jesus walks through every wall within seconds. Alienation, pride, sinfulness and hurt that took years to cultivate were destroyed in seconds through the power of God's all powerful love in the Gospel reading today.

And, at the end of the story, notice how the woman leaves her bucket behind at the well. Why? Because in this desert of her life, she found life giving water! A hungry soul was fed. A soul's thirst was quenched. At the end of the story, the once alienated woman becomes an evangelist at the heart of a believing community, leading people to Christ.

She has no name, but then perhaps again that is an invitation to see how our lives are like that woman at the well. In what ways are we unsettled, anxious, fearful or unsatisfied about our lives right now? Do we feel like our lives are in a desert right now? What walls have we constructed between Jesus and ourselves? We talk so much these days about self-quarantines. I wonder how easy it might end up being in the coming days of making the mistake of self-quarantining ourselves away from God. We can't allow this to happen in the coming weeks. We need Jesus by our side every step of the way.

This Third Sunday of Lent, we are invited to ask ourselves: what are we hungry for? What are we thirsty for? Can we close our eyes and prayerfully see ourselves at a well in a desert with Jesus approaching? Will we dare converse with Jesus at this place in our hearts? Yes, Lent is a time to fast and pray, this year more than ever. However, whatever physical thirst and hunger we encounter will remind us of our spiritual hunger and thirst. We long for the waters of our baptism and we long to encounter God in the Eucharist. We are reminded that we are not alone in this desert if we continue to trust in God and pray for each other. This will give us strength in the days ahead, this will give us hope. Always remember, we have food and drink that the world does not know.