

## THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT – YEAR A

Last weekend I performed one of my yearly rituals for the season of Lent: I watched the movie "The Ten Commandments."

The Exodus and the journey of the Israelites through the desert is a story of God's endless faithfulness contrasted with the people's repeated lack of trust.

And in the middle stands Moses who is ready to tear out that long white beard Charlton Heston wore so well.

Water in the desert is a precious commodity and unquenched thirst can lead a person to desperation.

Although God has rescued his chosen people many times, it seems that their wanderings cause them to get lost in forgetfulness, and so they begin to grumble and complain.

"Is the Lord in our midst or not?"

And then, once more, in spite of their lack of faith, God provides for their needs, causing water to flow out the rock.

This "crazy" faithfulness of God is reiterated in today's reading from St. Paul where he writes:

"But God proves his love for us in that - while we were yet sinners - Christ died for us."

"While we were yet sinners ..."

This is the depth of God's love for us.

And so Jesus came among us, not to condemn, but to save, so that "the love of God [might be] poured out into our hearts through the [gift of] the Holy Spirit."

That's what's going on in today's beautiful encounter of Jesus with the woman at the well.

When Jesus asks, "Give me a drink," he is thirsting for more than just water; he is thirsting to pour the love of God into the Samaritan woman's heart.

Notice how Jesus slowly but surely moves the conversation from the superficial to spiritual:

"If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

This touching story of human encounter with God who is ever-patient-yet-persistent.

Just as with the Israelites in the desert and through the prophets and saints of salvation history ... God never gives up on us, but is always reaching out to us in love.

In the person of Jesus the divine love story takes flesh, and when you and I allow ourselves to truly encounter Jesus, he awakens in us a spiritual thirst for a relationship with him.

I know that I use this quote often, but St. Augustine put it best: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

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Our hearts will remain thirsty until we believe that only God can quench our deepest thirst, our truest longing.

The season of Lent reminds us of the need to take time to allow ourselves to get in touch with our spiritual thirst.

But we also need to identify the ways we tend to fill ourselves up with stuff and noise and unnecessary busy-ness in order to avoid confronting that deeper thirst.

Lent invites us to embrace prayer, especially the silence wherein we can hear God's voice.

It challenges us to fast in order to experience the emptiness of hunger as a reminder of our hunger and thirst for God.

And Lent stretches our hearts through almsgiving which reveals to us that most fundamental spiritual truth: That all we have is gift and that we are called to become gift to others.

Lent is not meant to be a march through a parched and lifeless desert, but rather a journey of hope.

And as St. Paul so beautifully promises:

"Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit."

If we drink deeply of the living water Jesus gives, it will become in us "a spring of water welling up to eternal life."