

March 8, 2026—Third Sunday of Lent

We cannot survive without water. We can go longer without food than without water. So, they say, I, for one, don't want to put it to the test! Like so many things in God's creation, water has a deeper meaning, a spiritual meaning. Every time water is mentioned in the Holy Bible, it is not only about human thirst, but also about the Sacrament of Baptism and the grace of God. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 12:13), "**For by one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.**" Water is cleansing and life-giving, so is the grace of God.

The Israelite people were experiencing real thirst at the point of their journey through the desert that the First Reading recounts. Instead of praying to God, who had shown them so many miracles already, they complained to God. They cried out to Moses, "**Why did you ever make us leave Egypt? Was it just to have us die here of thirst with our children and our livestock?**" How ungrateful!

There were many tests the Israelites had to endure: threats from enemies, hunger and thirst and discouragement. This is part of the human condition. We have many trials and sufferings to endure but it doesn't mean that God has forsaken us. Although we don't always know God's plan, He uses these evils for good and in every case, they are an opportunity to grow in virtue. You don't develop good habits in life without resisting the bad habits. If you want to get stronger or faster in your sport, you must train and train hard. Practice, practice, practice! Every career or skill in life requires that you keep on updating your knowledge and keep working at it to get better. The Israelites did not see this struggle as a test from God, but an occasion of testing God, questioning: "**Is the Lord in our midst or not?**" As Catholics, we know that sufferings are not meaningless, for united with Jesus, they have redemptive power, the kind that redeemed the world.

God told Moses to take his staff and strike a barren rock. From that rock enough water flowed to take care of the thirst of the entire nation and their flocks. God was in their midst; He did take care of them. This is a lesson for us, too.

Water is also the central theme of this Sunday's Gospel. Jesus and His apostles stop outside a Samaritan town near a well, the Well of Jacob. After the apostles go into town to get some food, Jesus sees a woman coming up to the well with a bucket to draw water. He began a conversation with her by asking a favor. Would she give Him a drink? Since the Jews and Samaritans saw one another as enemies, she asked Him why He was speaking to her and asking her for a drink of water.

In their dialogue, the next two answers from Jesus are meant to have a deeper meaning than any drink of water from a well could provide: **“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.”** **“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”** Jesus is using water as an image for “the living water” of sanctifying grace that first comes to us in baptism and is meant to sustain us on the journey of life and be fulfilled in eternal life.

The woman doesn’t understand the deep spiritual meaning of Jesus’ words at this point. Jesus must help her morally before she can go further. The reason she was drawing water at noon, rather than with the other women at the cool time of the morning was because they rejected her immoral state. Jesus points out to her that she has had five husbands and the man she was living with was not her husband. The fact that Jesus knew her sad life story would move her to believe in Him! She later returned to the town and exclaimed, **“He told me everything that I had done.”**

It’s amazing that Jesus chose to reveal Himself as the Messiah to this woman. He didn’t even plainly tell that to His apostles yet. She said that when the Messiah came, he would tell them everything and Jesus responded, **“I am He, the one who is speaking to you.”** This woman became His messenger to the townspeople who also began to believe in Him because of her testimony. Jesus often chooses the most unlikely people as His witnesses, after all, He chose you and me.

After listening to Jesus for the two days He spent there, the townspeople said to the woman, **“We no longer believe because of your word, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world.”** The woman played her part and brought people to Jesus so that they could now have faith in Him. This has been the role of the Church from day one: preach the Gospel, give the grace of the sacraments, starting with baptism, and lead people to live lives of Christian morality and have true faith in Jesus. He has entrusted us with the message of salvation and the mission to bring it to the world today. To do that, we can’t just be cultural Catholics, but true believers in Jesus and His Church. If we don’t act by word and example and prayer, how will the Catholic faith spread. He is counting on us!