

Deacon David Olsen
Third Sunday of Lent
7 March 2010

Like many of us that have grown up here in the Northwest, I took our abundant water for granted. I have kayaked our rivers, canoed our lakes, sailed our sound. I have made tea with melted snow while backcountry skiing and refreshed my thirst in glacial streams while camping in the mountains.

Right after my wife and I were married, we moved to a small community south of Brisbane in Australia to do some mission work. It was our first Christmas together, and believing that our home should have a proper Christmas tree, with saw in hand, I headed off into the bush to find one. I walked three miles through gum trees before finding my first evergreen tree, and with visions of a white Christmas, I cut it down. Being young and a bit impetuous at the time, it hadn't immediately occurred to me that Christmas in Australia comes at the beginning of the summer, meaning I would have to drag the tree three miles back home in the 112 degree heat. By the time I returned home four hours later, I knew what thirst was. I was keenly aware of what it felt like to have every drop of water in my body leak out through my pores and my swollen tongue stick to the roof of my mouth behind parched, cracked lips.

Back at the house as I sat under the shade of a koolaba tree, slowly pouring a bucket of cold water over my head, today's first reading from the book of Exodus came to mind. For the first time in my life, I could empathize with the Israelites. No longer did I see them just as a sniveling group of whiners. When in the agony of dehydration, grumbling is a natural reaction and the thought of death is uppermost in your mind. Physical thirst for water is a powerful force, powerful enough that it brought the Samaritan women to Jacob's well in middle of the day; a place where she did not belong, at a time of day when she should not be there. But that did not keep her from going for water, her thirst was too great.

Our readings today also speak to us of another kind of thirst, a deeper thirst; our thirst for God. The reading from Exodus ends with the Israelites asking

the question: “Is the LORD in our midst or not?” While they might have been grumbling and quarreling over their lack of water, they recognized that it was God who provided for their needs, and the provision of water in the desert was a sign for them that God was still with them. The Samaritan woman might have come to the well to get physical water, but she went home with the living water that would bring her eternal life. She might not have known she was looking for the Messiah, but when she recognized Him, her physical thirst became secondary. Leaving her water jar she went to the village to spread the Good News.

Lent is the season that we prepare ourselves for the paschal mystery, the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection. It is a time that all of us, along with our candidates and elect, make choices about our response to His sacrifice, how are we going to quench our thirst and a thirsty world? Physical thirst is very much an issue in our world today. It is estimated that half of the world’s population, over three billion people, do not have access to clean drinking water. What choices can we make to help them? In my previous parish we started a sister parish relationship with Christ the King Cathedral in Bungoma Kenya. Our first project there was to dig two wells; one for the parish, and one for the community. With their physical thirst satisfied, they are free to focus their attention on deeper thirsts.

It is a fundamental truth that in the human heart there is a thirst for something that only Jesus, the living water, can satisfy. But that doesn’t stop us from trying to drown that thirst with an excess of possessions, wealth, status, power or promiscuity; all of these will mask our thirst but never quench it. Like the woman at the well, who knew the quality of the water from Jacob’s well but had never tasted of the living water; our choices might not be easy, but they are ones that need to be made in faith.

There is one more thirst that we hear of in our readings today, deeper still than our need for God, and possibly the greatest thirst in all of creation; God’s thirst for us. A thirst that can only be satisfied by our decision to chose God. Shortly after His provision of water to the Israelites in the desert, God tells them “I will take you for my people and I will be your God.” God’s desire is to be in a

living relationship with His people. To the woman at the well Jesus asks for water, and while He is fully human and certainly in need of physical water, He was more concerned about providing her, and all of us, with the living water that will satisfy our true thirst and bring us to eternal life in His presence.