

HOMILY LENT SUNDAY 03 – A (Homily 02)

“Thirsting for More”

(Exodus 17:3-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-2, 5-8; John 4:5-42)

Have you ever heard the country song, *Thank God for Unanswered Prayer*?

Believe in Jesus, and trust him at all times.

The singer in that song is looking back over his life, and realizes how fortunate he is that God did not answer some of his prayers when he was younger. In one verse, he meets the girl he had hoped to marry as a youth, wonders what he saw in her at that time, realizes it would never have worked out and is grateful for that unanswered prayer.

The readings today centre on two dynamics in our lives. The first is all about human wants and desires, and how God handles those human cravings. The second is the experience of the apparent absence of God in our lives at times, the experience of unanswered prayer, leading the Hebrew people to ask, “Is God among us or not?” Who of us has not had moments when we felt like asking the same question?

The symbol that is used to provide biblical insights into our common human situation, in both the first reading and the Gospel, is not a country song, but the simple thirst for water. That thirst for physical water, however, is a symbol of the thirst that all human beings feel within them for something deeper, something spiritual, for more meaning to their lives, for purpose, fulfilment and well-being.

Ron Rolheiser, in his book *The Holy Longing*, addresses this thirst. He speaks of a constant restlessness, a disease, a desire for consummation and wholeness that permeates modern humanity. He identifies that *longing for more* in our lives as *Eros*, a divine energy, a holy longing, a fire burning within the human soul and spirit. Rolheiser even goes so far as to call spirituality an erotic urge.

How do we respond to this holy longing? How do we handle this challenge to be fully human and live out our human incompleteness in a healthy way?

The first reading provides us with two responses. The first response is that of the people. They complain, murmur and quarrel among themselves, even wanting to go back to Egypt, to the land of enslavement. They are experiencing the apparent

absence of God in their lives, and immediately they head towards relapse, to going back to the misery they knew before rather than risk going forward in faith to a new life.

So it is with many of us. When it seems that God is not responding to our demands, we lack faith and are tempted to once again put our trust in the false gods of money, fame and power.

The other response is that of Moses. A man of faith, Moses takes these complaints of the people and turns to the Lord in prayer, sharing with God his dilemma and the plight of the people. God answers his prayer with a further challenge to his faith. Moses is to go further into the desert and strike a rock with a staff to find life-giving water. And so he does, though elsewhere in the scriptures we are told that he did lack faith and struck the rock twice, an action that cost him the joy of entering the Promised Land, a land that he would only see from afar.

The Gospel presents us with another response. There we meet a fascinating character who also thirsted for water, only to find someone, Jesus, who revealed to her a deeper thirst that she had, and a way to quench that deeper thirst through faith in him.

The Samaritan woman came to the well at mid-day, out of shame and shyness. She was a marginalized person who had a history of failed relationships and was living common-law with her present partner. She was a woman who was longing for love, acceptance, self-esteem, relationship and meaning. Jesus took the initiative, broke all religious and cultural boundaries, spoke to her, and drew her into a life-changing conversation.

Jesus accepted her as she was and believed in who she could become. Slowly, step by step, he led her to reflect on her own life and need, and to realize that he was more than a friendly stranger. He was the Messiah, the one who could answer her deepest need. He, in a sense, heard her confession, extended to her God's compassion and forgiveness, and empowered her to become the first evangelist, the first one to announce to others the Good News of God's compassion, forgiveness and healing come to live among us.

An Oblate missionary assigned to minister on a First Nations community started his ministry by visiting every home to introduce himself to the people and to practice his Cree. He was welcomed into one home by a young woman who was a single parent of five children and was expecting a sixth. When the missionary

commented on her five children, she made no bones about informing him that they were all from different fathers, except the one she was expecting. That one would be the second child from her present partner who was in jail for his abusive behaviour when drinking. The missionary sympathized with her, suggesting that it was hard to find a permanent, long-lasting relationship. He tried to support her as best as he could. He affirmed her efforts to raise the children alone and also serve as the receptionist at the Band Office. He proposed starting a Bible Study in her home, hoping that through this study of the Word of God, she would find strength to cope with her challenges and become part of a community of faith. As he left he could not help but think of today's gospel, and feel that he had just met a Samaritan woman. He was filled with hope that like the Samaritan woman, she would also meet Jesus as the one who could offer her a life filled with greater meaning, peace and even joy.

The Eucharist that we celebrate today is our encounter with Jesus at the well. In the penitential rite, he accepts us as we are, and invites us to experience him through his Word and receive his Body and Blood in communion. Forgiven, healed and strengthened, we are then sent out like the Samaritan woman to invite others to come and meet someone who has given us the waters of eternal life to drink.

So as we celebrate today, let us respond to our holy longing by placing our faith in Jesus, open ourselves to receiving him through Word and Sacrament, and then follow him in trust through all of life's varied experiences.