

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Today's Gospel takes place at a well — Jacob's well in the midst of Samaria — and water is a focal point of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman He encounters. You know about water; it has an important place in the Scripture. For one, God used it to destroy everything in the world except for that which was saved in the ark (Gen. 6-9). Pharaoh's army was destroyed in the Red Sea (Ex. 14:26ff). The disciples, some of them experienced fishermen, were frightened by a storm on the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 8:23ff). Today we've learned in certain places, to harness water's power to generate electricity, but its destructive power is still evident from hurricanes in Florida to atmospheric rivers in California.

Water is also used to clean, to wash, to bathe ... in the home and in sacred settings. According to the LORD's instructions, between the altar and the tabernacle was "*a basin of bronze, with its stand of bronze, for washing*" (Ex. 30:18). Of course, in the church, Holy Baptism is the "*washing of water and the word*" (Eph. 5:26). It's one way we are sanctified and given birth into the kingdom of God (John 3:5), as we heard last Sunday.

Water plays an important role in our Gospel lesson today. Perhaps there is a baptismal connection — after all, Jesus had just taught Nicodemus about the birth of "*water and the Spirit*" in the previous chapter of John; moreover, the first verses of John 4 has Jesus "*making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples)*" (John 4:1-2). But it seems more to me that Jesus is not talking about water for bathing or cleansing, but water for drinking.

That's perhaps the most important use of water — to support life, for vegetation and livestock, and for us. Without water, we experience famine (Gen. 41). Without water, seeds don't sprout and grow (1 Cor. 3:6-7), or tender plants wither and die in the hot sun (Matt. 13:5-6).

And we? We are mostly water — men about 60% water, I read. Now, we know that God made us from "*the dust of the ground,*" but the potter doesn't shape dry dust. No, water is added to make clay — in the words of Moses, "*a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground*" (Gen. 2:6-7), so that the dust became "*clay*" in the hands of the LORD, "*our potter,*" and we were made by "*the work of [His] hand*" (Isa. 64:8). Without water, we quickly die and turn back to dust (Gen. 3:19).

Water is vital for life. In the beginning, Moses tells us, when God created the heavens and the earth, before He caused any living thing to come forth in the earth, water covered the earth. And in the next several days, God was working with water, separating the water above from the water below, and then gathering the

waters into seas and letting the dry land to appear. Then He brought forth living things (Gen. 1).

We as Christians know the importance of water for life. The Bible bears witness to it. Deer and animals of all kinds pant after it. The Israelites grumbled and whined to Moses about it, complaining about dying of thirst. Wells were dug to collect it, like Jacob's well where Jesus stopped. And back in the time of Jesus, women would make their way to the wells, get water, and port it back to their homes. So it was when Jesus encountered a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well.

Thus, in our Gospel today, Jesus' true humanity is in clear focus. "*God is spirit,*" Jesus says in our text, and so the pre-incarnate Son of God was ... spirit. But descending from the Father's side, He did not remain spirit only. If He had, He would not have thirsted — not here in Samaria or later on the cross (John 19:28); He would have had no need for water. But the Son of God united humanity with His eternal Divine person and was born of woman, coming in the weakness of our flesh. Therefore, in His humility, the Son of God set aside the use of His Divine powers, choosing in our Gospel not to bring forth water from a rock, as He had done for Israel in the wilderness, but to ask the Samaritan woman for a drink.

Yet, as important as water is to sustain this body and life — even Jesus' fleshly life — there is a water that is greater. It's the water that Christ gives, the water that wells up to eternal life. Christ gives living water. What is this water?

The Psalmist gives us a hint: "*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers*" (Ps. 1:1-3). This water is "*the law of the LORD,*" not the law as compared to the Gospel, but the law as God's word that includes the Gospel. As the great Psalm of the word says: "*Let your steadfast love come to me, O LORD, your salvation according to your promise; then shall I have an answer for him who taunts me, for I trust in your word*" (Ps. 119:41-42).

This living water is the word, the word spoken, the Word Incarnate, the words that flow forth from Him. Israel was saved physically by the water that came forth from the rock, but more importantly, they were saved spiritually as they "*all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ*" (1 Cor. 10:4).

Truly as important as water is to physical life, living water is given us for eternal life. The woman wanted to know where to get this living water — she didn't realize the source stood right before her. He invites all to come and drink

from Him. *“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters”* (Isa. 55:1). *“Let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price”* (Rev. 22:17).

Jesus is the source of this living water, as He Himself would later say: *“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and let him who believes in me drink. As the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’”* (John 7:37-38). And from His heavenly throne, the Alpha and the Omega Himself says to St. John the Divine, *“To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment”* (Rev. 21:6).

Many people today seek a fountain that gives eternal life, but when they look away from Christ, they seek a mythical “fountain of youth.” Christ is the true fountain, the source of the water that quenches the strongest thirst for life.

This water is found in Christ’s word. His word is the rain and snow from heaven that fills wells and springs and streams with the water of life; Christ’s word is the rain that waters the seed and brings forth faith and causes it to grow. *“So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it”* (Isa. 55:11). Truly, all of the Scriptures bear witness to Jesus (John 5:39); Moses wrote of Jesus. The prophets and the psalms wrote of Jesus.

And our confessions call the Scriptures, *“the pure, clear fountain of Israel”* (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Rule and Norm, 3). When we drink from this fountain, then we drink of the living water that flows from Christ. When we abide in the living water of His word, then we are truly His disciples; then we know the truth and are set free. When we abide in Jesus’ word, looking to Him who *“died for the ungodly,”* trusting in the God who loved us enough to send His own Son to die for us *“while we were still sinners,”* then we know that Jesus is indeed the Savior of the world; then we have peace with God; then we have gained access to God by faith; then we are true worshippers of God; then we worship Him in spirit and truth. Then this water, the water that Jesus gives, will well up in us into a spring of water that leads to eternal life.

Lord, give us this water that we may never thirst again. Let us drink this living water from Christ faithfully unto the end that faith may well up in us as a spring unto eternal life.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.