

Third Sunday of Lent, Year A, Xavier Church, Ex. 17:3-7; Ps. 95:1-2, 6-9; Rom. 5:1-2, 5-8; Jn. 4:5-42.

Fr. Ward Biemans SJ

Dear brothers and sisters, it begins with an ordinary encounter between Jesus and a woman from Samaria. Jesus is tired and asks her for a drink. Then a conversation begins that quickly takes on great depth. Jesus says to her, 'If you knew who it was that said to you, "Give me a drink," you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.'

The woman does not understand what He means by living water. So, Jesus explains to her: 'The water I give will become in you a spring of water welling up to eternal life. Whoever drinks this water will never thirst again.' Of course, the woman wants to drink that water, and I think we all do. But the conversation continues. Jesus knows the woman's life story. He says that she has spoken the truth that her current husband is not really her husband. Jesus wants to hear the truth from us, and even more than that: He is the truth.

The woman then talks to Jesus about her ancestors who went to pray on the mountain, and she also knows that for the Jews, Jerusalem is the place where people go to pray. But Jesus' answer to the woman goes beyond pointing to a place. Jesus tells her that our heavenly Father seeks people who worship Him in spirit and truth. This way of praying is not tied to a particular place or time.

The apostle Paul explains to us how we should understand Jesus' words. He says that God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Christ died for us so that the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, could come into our hearts. Through the Spirit, we receive the strength to do what God asks of us. This can be, for example, faithfulness in prayer, faithfulness in our work, faithfulness in our relationships.

When Jesus speaks of the source of living water that wells up within us to eternal life, He means this spiritual power, which has accompanied us from the moment we received Baptism and which was confirmed with the sacrament of

Confirmation. It is a power that is not only individual but also present in the community that comes together to celebrate the Eucharist.

The Israelites received water from the rock from the Lord, enabling them to drink in the desert. The Lord thus demonstrated His faithfulness by not abandoning them after He had first freed them from slavery in Egypt. God's covenant with the people of Israel is a covenant that has never been revoked.

But this gesture of the Lord in the desert, this water, is different from the living water that Jesus speaks of. Moses strikes the rock with his staff and water flows out, which is a great miracle and a help in times of need, but it is water that only quenches thirst for a moment. Moses calls this place Massah and Meribah. Both words mean quarrelling, bickering, in Hebrew. The two place names are meant to remind the Israelites that they should not be stubborn and should not put God to the test, as is also expressed in the well-known Psalm 95. The living water that Jesus speaks of comes from the inner source of the Spirit. This water will quench your thirst for eternity. When the Samaritan woman hears this, she goes to the city and tells everyone about her encounter. The people then leave the city to go to Jesus. The same can happen to us when we tell others about Jesus and his word that is heard every weekend in the Church. Then it may happen that the people who hear what we say recognise it, sometimes as something from the past or sometimes as something they have never heard before. The latter may be especially true for young people. They may be touched by it; it may open a new perspective on life in love, life without end. Let us commit ourselves to this in our surroundings, our network and our prayers, that the Word of Jesus may reach these people, for the fields are white, ripe for harvest. Amen.