

Hom031917Lent3A

If someone gives me a live plant for the house I become anxious. I know it is only a matter of time when my neglecting to water it will mean its death. Sometimes I have watered just in time to move a plant from dying to thriving again.

Our first reading and Gospel remind us of the importance of water in its application to human thirst. In the first reading the shortage of drinking water caused the people to grumble to their leader Moses (and indirectly to God). They said they should have stayed slaves in Egypt rather than be threatened with thirst in the desert. God reminded them that He was there to take care of them and He provided water for them from the most unlikely of places, a hard rock.

In the Gospel Jesus used the occasion of His own human thirst to strike up a conversation with a Samaritan woman. After asking her for a drink (and we never find out whether He actually got it), He spoke to her of a greater water that He had to give. It would be a living water. The immediate sense was the moving water of a spring as opposed to the still and stagnant water of the well. The location was Jacob's well which symbolized the religious tradition shared by Jews and Samaritans, who recognized a common ancestry in Jacob. The woman was a Samaritan, from those who had historically separated themselves from the larger Jewish group. Jesus, while He was incarnate, enfleshed, within the Jewish religion and culture initiated a new religious group - Christians, those who would follow Him and believe in Him. And with this new group a new source of water was introduced.

Jesus was, of course, speaking about more than physical water and more than physical thirst. Indeed, no amount of natural water, stagnant or flowing, could make one live forever. What Jesus was describing was grace. Grace is the freely given gift of God that places a share of His own divine life within us. It transforms us from inside out to more effectively be and act as images of God. As Jesus' description tells us, it is a water that "becomes a spring of water, welling up to eternal life." It is the Holy Spirit planted within us to thrive and grow and prompt us to act in fidelity to God, to glorify Him, to show forth the goodness of God in our actions toward others. It is grace that adopts us as God's children and allows us to call Him Father.

In our second reading Paul spoke of grace. We have gained access by faith, to grace. And it is hard not to

think of water when he adds that the "the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." That's what grace is all about. And, lest we forget the sense in which it is a freely given gift, not something we earned, St. Paul reminds us that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. It was His death that makes the flow of living water into us and within us possible.

As we move through Lent we are preparing the annual solemn celebration of the event of Jesus dieing for us, and His subsequent rising from the dead which released those waters of God's love that not only pour into hearts, but well up unto eternal life.

It is a good time, therefore, to remind ourselves of how we believe God, through Jesus Christ, does pour grace into our hearts. Now God can give His grace, His life anyway He wants. However, in appreciation of our human condition and our need for concrete experiences, we believe Jesus gave His Church the seven sacraments to be the special tools, the instruments, of this pouring out and in of God's love. Through a combination of words and some physical substance or act performed by a minister, a worker for God, God, in Jesus Christ, pours His life into our souls.

In baptism, the sacrament that initiates the life of the grace the imagery of water used in our scriptures today is most obvious. Water is the physical element used in baptism to pour God's love into one's heart, and through the rush of love, caused by the pouring of water over the head, the flow of grace washes away sin and gets that interior spring flowing. The pouring of the water in baptism does not merely symbolize a separate action of God, it is part of the cause of the washing away of sin and giving o new life. That is the pattern of all the sacraments.

Hopefully our serious effort this Lent will be an exercise of opening of our hearts and minds and souls for the pouring in of God's love. And like the plants that are enlivened by water, our behavior will affirm the effectiveness of our welcome of grace. Our actions will mimic the beauty of the flowers and the nourishment of the fruits and vegetables we water in our gardens.

Here in the Mass we experience the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. It is here we participate in the worship Jesus introduced, the worship that is in Spirit and truth. It is here that in the Holy Spirit Jesus makes His great act of worship present to us. It is here that we join

Jesus in His offering to the Father so that all the more
the living waters within us will flow and become fruitful.