

**THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT - YEAR A**

**24 FEBRUARY 2008**

**First Reading: Ex 17:3-7**

**Second Reading: Rom 5:1-2. 5-8**

**Gospel: Jn 4:5-42**

## **GIVE ME A DRINK**

It has been said that a person can live for a few weeks without any food, but can only live a few days without any water. I'm not sure about the exact scientific accuracy of that observation, but at least it does remind us of how important good drinking water is! And all of us in Zambia know the importance of good drinking water – and we experience the difficulty sometimes to get that water!

On this third Sunday of Lent, we hear Jesus ask for a drink of water. The Gospel of St. John tells the beautiful story of Jesus' meeting a Samaritan woman at a well. He is tired and thirsty, and he says directly to her: "Give me a drink."

But as the story unfolds, it turns out that Jesus is the one who gives the woman a drink – not of *physical* water but of *spiritual* refreshment. The conversation of the woman reveals that she – like all of us today – is the one who is really thirsty, thirsty and longing for the refreshment of deeper faith, of complete forgiveness, of true love. Jesus is the one who gives that refreshment, as he tells the woman: "I am he!"

In the first reading we see something about people who are thirsty and how they have their thirst satisfied. The Exodus story tells us that the Israelites are wandering in the desert after having been freed from terrible slavery in Egypt. But now they are complaining against Moses and asking him why he led them out into the desert where they and their children and their cattle will die of thirst. But God protects Moses from the anger of the people and shows him how to get water for them by striking a rock. Yes, God is truly with the people and satisfies their thirst.

But if we look more closely at the story we can also see that the people are thirsty for something more than water, however important that is for them. They are thirsting for good leadership, leadership that they can trust and can follow without any doubts or fears. They are not so sure that Moses is that leader and that's why they raise such a fuss.

Now how about us, the citizens of Zambia? Are we not a people who are thirsting for good leadership? Leadership both in our church and in our country?

For our church, we want chairs of our small Christian communities who really serve the people. We look for clear and unselfish guidance from the local priests and catechists and parish councilors. We expect the Bishops and all those who work for the Bishops Conference (ZEC) to be good leaders in strengthening our faith and helping all of our parishes to be centres of good liturgies and care for the people. We also expect our Bishops to be leaders in promoting justice and peace in the country by speaking out fearlessly for good governance and special concern for the poor.

For our country, the challenge of good leadership is really great! We want political leaders who inspire the people with vision and dignity, who are known to be completely honest and incorruptible, and who work hard and intelligently to promote the common good for all and true development in the country. Whether local councilors, Members of Parliament, Cabinet Ministers or the President himself, all elected officials are expected to "servant leaders,"

putting the interests of the people above the interests of themselves, their families or their tribes.

So you and I might ask: will Jesus really give us the water of refreshment? Will he really quench our thirst for what is truly good in life and lead us to the flowing waters of joy and peace? We might have some doubts, some lack of faith in what God can do for us. Those feelings can be very natural. Some scripture commentators tell us that Moses himself had doubts about whether God would really let water flow from the rock and therefore he struck the rock twice (see Numbers 20:11).

The Samaritan woman in John's Gospel today came to believe in Jesus because she stayed with him in discussion – almost a debate! – and realised that he was the one who was going to give her to drink waters of forgiveness and acceptance and love. She didn't doubt and she even went to tell this good news to all her friends.

That's why it is important at this point in our Lenten journey toward Easter that we take to heart the lesson in today's second reading, from the letter of St. Paul to the Romans. The message of the reading is very consoling and strengthening indeed. Paul tells us that our hopes about gaining the peace and grace of God's love are not false hopes or mere deceptions. No, "This hope is not deceptive, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us." And that Holy Spirit is the gift that comes to us because Christ died for us!

Those words of Paul aren't just pious sentiments without any consequences for you and me. They are clear teachings that should ground our hope and our trust in God's love shown in the life, death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus. That's why Lent is a very good time to look at our belief that God truly does love each of us, not because we are good and worthy but simply because we are his children, his daughters and sons. And we are the sisters and brothers of Jesus!

#### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING IN SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES**

- In what way can I contribute to making my parish a centre that cares for people?
- When choosing leaders, do I only choose someone from whom I will personally benefit or do I choose someone who will work for the good of everyone in Zambia?
- In my family life, do what practical steps do I take to make my family a happy one?

#### **SKETCH**

Have a group of five people act as a small Christian community dissatisfied with their chair. He usually appears only when there is a meeting outside the parish because it gives him an opportunity to visit other places. Although relatively new in the parish, he was chosen because he spoke so well at meetings. When his term of office finishes, the community chooses a woman who says very little but is very selfless and really faithful to all her duties. The whole community is now very happy.

#### **COMMUNITY PRAYERS**

- Lord we pray for guidance in our choices so that we choose leaders who have the interests of the people at heart! *Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us*
- Lord, we pray for church leaders that they may provide good leadership so that our faith may be strengthened and our parishes become centres of good liturgies and care for the people' *Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*
- Lord, we pray for parents that they may give good leadership to their children. *Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*