

Third Sunday of Lent A - Jesus is thirsting to fill our hearts with peace, courage, and true self-esteem

March 15, 2020

Every time I read the Gospel reading of **the Samaritan woman at the well** (John 4:5), it brought back memories of my early life in Hong Kong. Everybody knows water is an essential resource; without it, there is no life. In the 60s, Hong Kong saw a massive population increase along with a very severe drought. Since it lacked (and still lacks) natural streams, it depended on reservoirs to collect rain water. There was simply not enough water to go around and the government had to ration water supply by providing only four hours of usage every day. In 1963, the worst year, water supply was rationed for only 4 hours every 4 days. I had to queue on the streets to gather water with buckets and tin containers and then carry them up the stairs to take home for my family of six, hoping that the few buckets of water will quench our thirst and supply for all our needs.

St. Teresa of Calcutta once said when Jesus said on the cross, “I thirst”, he is thirsting for our love for him, for the poor. Thirst is not only limited to water. There are many things in our life we “thirst” for, both physically, socially and mentally. A Chinese mini-film “Mr Lim’s Reunion Dinner” tells about a dad Mr Lim, awaiting his kids’ homecoming for the traditional Chinese New Year Eve reunion dinner. As the day nears, he learns that both his son and daughter, who live and work overseas, aren’t able to make it home for the dinner. His son has work to finish while his daughter has plans to take her young son, Aaron, to Tokyo Disneyland. He doesn’t share with either of them that he is all alone for Chinese New Year. Instead he goes ahead with the preparation the next day with grocery shopping and cooking the dinner. He sets up the table, sitting alone facing the drinks and food. He’s not thirsty for water nor hunger for food. **His is thirsting for love, the love of his family.** An unexpected twist comes at the end when everyone, including Aaron and his father, suddenly show up in time for dinner just as Mr Lim begins to dig into the food himself. Their arrival is timely and brings joy to everyone: Love has arrived, love has quenched the thirst.

As for the Samaritan woman at the well, it was more than thirst for water. She came to the well at noon, the hottest hour of the middle-eastern day because she was a social outcast, avoiding contact with her peers. Jesus notices her anxiety that comes from an unstable life, but he also sees a spark of sincerity. Her wounded and suffering heart from many failed marriages and relationships was thirsting for true love. This provides an opportunity for grace, and our Lord, forgetting his own thirst, seizes it by restoring her dignity and changing her life forever. The Samaritan woman was so overcome with joy at encountering Christ, so eager to spread the news of her conversion that she left behind her empty water jar, her sinful past and reunited with her community. Jesus wants to quench the thirst from the absence of God in her life, in our lives, to redeem us, to give us a fresh start by having a relationship with him so we can find peace and rest in God.

I like to tune into the Catholic TV Network, one of my favourites. I can attend mass and receive the Eucharist (An Act of Spiritual Communion) daily which I thirst for. I can say the Angelus, the Holy Rosary, evening Divine Office.... with Bishop Robert Reed, the auxiliary Bishop of Boston. It makes me feel I am not alone. I love singing since I was young though off tune most of the time. Having lost my voice since the stroke, I thirst to sing. Their “Going my Way” sing-along episodes is my favourite: Church hymns, Jazz, Irish folks etc. In one of the episodes, Bishop Reed dressed in his full red vestment and sang together with two other well vested priests, two love songs from Elvis Presley, yes Elvis, “The King of Rock and Roll”: **Love me Tender and Can’t Help Falling in Love.** That night in bed, I digested and meditated on the lyrics. They sounded like a prayer. In the Gospels, doesn’t Jesus mention many times He is the Bridegroom and the Church, us, is the Bride? Isn’t it logical for the Bride, while waiting for the coming of the Bridegroom patiently, thirsts for His love? Isn’t it just normal for the Bride to pray to quench her thirst? ***“Love me tender, love me dear, tell me you are mine. I’ll be yours through all the years 'Till the end of time. Love me tender, love me true All my dreams fulfill. For, my darling I love you And I always will”*** and ***“I can’t help falling in love with you. ... Like a river flows, surely to the***

sea Darling... some things are meant to be. Take my hand, take my whole life too. Oh, for I can't help falling in love with you"

I am sure we all have experienced God's unconditional love in our lives one way or another. But we need to experience it more. We need to build our lives on it. We need the knowledge of God's unconditional and redeeming love in Christ to penetrate every fibre of our being. To make that happen, God sent us the Holy Spirit, through whom, St Paul, in his letter to the Romans (5:5) tells us, "**...the love of God has been poured out into our hearts.**" Like the water in the reservoirs for drinking, we all have a reservoir of divine strength and courage in our hearts, established at our baptism, and enlarged at our confirmation. We need to bring water from that reservoir and drench every sector of our lives with it: our relationships, our hopes, our fears, our dreams, our difficulties, our sins, our weaknesses. We can only do that through prayer. If prayer is not the highest priority of our daily schedule, the reservoir stagnates. Daily, intimate, heart-to-heart conversations with Jesus Christ, our redeemer, allow his grace to flow freely in and through us. This is what the Samaritan woman discovered when she met Jesus at the well. While we are thirsting for God's grace, His mercy, forgiveness, and ultimately His tenderness and unconditional love, **Jesus is there waiting for us at the well of prayer, just as he was waiting for her - thirsting to fill our hearts with peace, courage, and true self-esteem - the kind that only he can give in our search for the unending, the unchanging and the eternal.**