

3rd Sunday of Lent

My friend Fr. Aloysius Kasoma occasionally visits from Uganda. On one trip, he made an appeal to pay for gutters on his rectory so that the neighbors in his remote area could collect rainwater for their homes. This saved them a long trek carrying large plastic containers to retrieve water from a pond shared by cattle. To this day, some people, in some places, regularly walk to some well to get potable water for the day. Oblivious to these needs, I sometimes complain when water in a hotel room isn't sufficiently hot, when repairs under city streets cause water pressure to drop in my shiny sink at home, or when I forget to bring bottled water to the office and have to drink ordinary water from the tap. We live near one of the greatest rivers in the world, and potable water is so available to us that we can complain about inconveniences while ignoring the many people who don't have reliable fresh water at all.

The woman in Samaria today may appear to be someone disadvantaged from access to water, but she lived in a town with a good water source, and she had the freedom and equipment to use it for her benefit. She mocks Jesus for not bringing a bucket to a deep cistern. How on earth did he expect to get water under the earth? He commanded her, "Give me a drink;" later, she commanded him, "give me this [living] water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." At home she had no spigot, no shower head, no nozzle. All she had was thirst. She didn't want plumbing, which did exist in the first century luxury homes of Palestine. She wanted to be perpetually slaked.

A good Lent exercise may be to examine our conscience by examining our thirsts—considering how we spend our money and our time. With money, many people live paycheck to paycheck. Some have to make impossible choices between medicine and food. But almost all of us spend on some things we think will satisfy our thirsts, even though they don't. With time, we often say we're really busy, and a lot of people are. But many of us spend some of our day in idle conversation, doomscrolling, or indulging the recollection of grievances. We are thirsting for companionship, beauty, and inner peace, but we often go to the wrong well. We retrieve death-dealing water, not life-giving water.

Thirsting for companionship, beauty and inner peace is good. Achieving those goals will enrich our lives and help us serve others. Jesus tells the woman in so many words, "You want companionship? Become my disciple. You want beauty? Listen to my words. You want inner peace? Serve others."

In Lent we equip the rectory of our souls with the gutters of prayer, fasting and almsgiving to collect the rainwater of a virtuous life. Yet sometimes, even when Jesus Christ, the wellspring of eternal life, sits before our eyes, we mistake who he is, mock his ideas, ignore the parched poor, and seek a less satisfying source to slake our thirst.

Think back over the past twenty-four hours. What have you been thirsting for? Into which well did you drop the bucket of your money and time? What is your soul really thirsting for? In the next twenty-four hours, what will you do to drink living water?