

Seton Hall University

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Celebrant's Guide and Commentary and Reflections for Sundays and Festivals (February 24, 2008)

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Celebrant's Guide and Commentary and Reflections for Sundays and Festivals

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THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT
February 24, 2008

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INTRODUCTION TO THE MASS

The steps of preparation taken by the candidates for Baptism provide an example for all the faithful; the readings of Lent provide guiding principles for everyone to appreciate more deeply the Paschal Mystery of Christ's Death-and-Resurrection.

INVITATION TO REPENTANCE

As we seek God the Father's blessings we acknowledge our sins and failings, obstacles to the work of Christ in our hearts.

Lord Jesus, renew your gift of forgiveness in your Church, Lord have mercy.
Lord Jesus, lead us to the waters of life in the Spirit, Christ have mercy.
Lord Jesus, nourish us with the Bread of Life, Lord have mercy.

HEADINGS FOR THE READINGS

First Reading (Ex 17:3-7). Gratitude for past favors is often tested by trying circumstances of the present. The Exodus as a sign of God's providence is forgotten when people in the wilderness become thirsty.

Second Reading (Rom 5:1-8). The gifts of divine love and peace come through the Death-and-Resurrection of Christ. He died to bring reconciliation and new life in service of the heavenly Father.

Gospel (Jn 4:5-42). Jesus led the Samaritan woman to appreciate that his gift of living water would satisfy her spiritual thirst for the teaching that brings eternal life.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

President: Heavenly Father, in Baptism we received the gifts enabling us to worship in Spirit and truth. We present these petitions for the Church throughout the world.

Reader:

May all teachers in the Church, especially Pope Benedict and all bishops and parents, guide those in their care.

May those preparing for Baptism and Confirmation become ever more open to the call of faith in the service of the Gospel.

May those persecuted because of their faith remain steadfast and soon find relief from their trials.

May those searching for the profound meaning of life encounter the Word that brings true freedom and peace.

May all who have died recently, especially those neglected by their neighbors, be brought to eternal life.

President: God of mercy, bless all who seek the way of truth and charity in their lives. Bestow upon the people of our communities the light to foster the way of peace in our world. This we ask through Christ our Lord.

INVITATION TO THE LORD'S PRAYER

Through Baptism we enjoy the privilege of praying in Spirit and truth. United with Jesus we pray as he taught us:

INVITATION TO HOLY COMMUNION

“Whoever drinks the water which I shall give never thirst” (Jn 4:14). May all who receive the Bread of Life accomplish the Father's will and complete his work.

COMMUNION REFLECTION

Those who hunger and thirst for God's work to be accomplished will find the Eucharistic presence of the risen Christ to be their source of strength. In union with Jesus and guided by the Spirit of truth, all who seek the will of the Father should grow in the faith that works through charity.

COMMENTARY

First Reading (Ex 17:3-7). After the Exodus the Israelites sought potable water but were frustrated until Moses threw a tree into the pool called *Marah* (bitter). Calling them to listen to his voice God assured them: “I am the LORD, your healer” (Ex 15:22-26). Even more dramatically, God showed Moses how to draw fresh water from a rock. Moses turned the people's bitter complaint into a prayer. Those in desperation should learn to seek an intercessor, a spiritual guide.

Responsorial Psalm (Ps 95:1-2, 6-9). This portion of the Invitatory (the psalm opening the Divine Office of the Church each day) proclaims that God is the Good Shepherd who exhorts the faithful to listen to his voice of encouragement and command.

Second Reading (Rom 5:1-8). After the *kerygma* (core message) of the Gospel (Rom 4:24-25), Paul introduces the theme of *agape* (charity) poured into the hearts of the baptized through the Holy Spirit. The *kerygma* of Jesus' salvific work in the Paschal Mystery of his Death-and-Resurrection must be completed by the details of the *didache* (teaching) to apply the Good News to the life of the Church.

Gospel (Jn 4:5-42). To initiate a dialogue with a Samaritan woman, Jesus overcame obstacles by expressing a need. She could assist him and, after mutual hostility between alienated neighbors was set aside, Jesus would challenge her to search for spiritual gifts. In John 3:5-8, water and the Holy Spirit are shown to be the external and internal sources of a new and fuller life. Just as bodily thirst is a basic need to be relieved, so the authentic human desire for God's teaching will receive a response in revelation through the Spirit of truth (see Jn 14:25-27; 16:12-15). Coming to Jesus as the source of

“water welling up to eternal life” (Jn 4:14) the recipient will become a channel of God’s gift to others (see Jn 7:37-39). After the woman heeded to Jesus’ judgment of her marital situation she became a missionary to her people, who were led to know Jesus. Salvation comes from the Jews (Jn 4:22) because the One greater than Jacob has called people into a life of faith that will produce a rich harvest (Jn 4:35-38).

REFLECTION

During the season of Lent the Church teaches us to appreciate the marvel of divine mercy in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus' Death-and-Resurrection. God's loving kindness (*hesed* in Hebrew) is a gift intimately associated with the Covenant; the specific note stressed by "mercy" (*eleos*, the Greek word often translated *hesed* in the Bible used by the early Church) is the acknowledgment of human sinfulness and need of forgiveness. "It is important to impress on the minds of the faithful not only the social consequences of sin but also the fact that the real essence of the virtue of penance is hatred of sin as an offense against God" (Second Vatican Council, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, no. 109, regarding Lent).

We began Lent with the penitential symbol of ashes; on the First Sunday we recalled the contrast between our disobedient first parents and the Son who was obedient to the Father, even unto death. The theme of the Third Sunday is the bestowal of life-giving water upon God's people, who are also in desperate need of the cleansing power of divine mercy. These readings can lead us to reflect upon the sacraments of Baptism and Penance as we intensify our preparation for Holy Week.

To penetrate into the meaning of the Paschal Mystery of Jesus, we must refresh our memory concerning the Exodus from Egypt and the wandering of the Israelites in the Sinai desert.

The New Testament writers teach that the "hour" of Jesus (when he passes through death to the Father) should be understood within the framework of the Passover, the annual Jewish celebration of the Exodus.

When the Israelites lacked the precious water necessary for themselves and their flocks they forgot the miseries of slavery and the wonders of God's work of deliverance. They complained against Moses so vociferously that he feared for his life. Only he knew enough to turn to God in prayer during the hour of need. To overcome the sin of doubting God's presence with us in times of distress or crisis, we should cultivate a greater knowledge of God's ways. This can be accomplished through prayerful study of the Scriptures and the history of the Church.

Over the centuries people in the Middle East saved water from the winter rains to sustain them throughout the dry, hot summer. However, they naturally preferred "living water" from a flowing stream or fountain to the stale contents of a cistern. Women came to the well of Jacob in the early morning or evening and there exchanged the news of the day as they filled their jugs with cold, fresh water. Who would come to draw water at *noon*? Only a woman who was ostracized, in this case probably because of sin. Jesus challenged her to acknowledge the irregularity of her marital relationships so that he could bestow upon her, and the community where she lived, the gift of water that manifests the new life of the Spirit.

Those who share in this life must overcome the sins of division that so often pit one group against another. Today Jews and Samaritans live in relative harmony, but the deep divisions between Israeli and Arab, between Jew and Muslim, Muslim and Christian must be exposed to the healing, cleansing

water of divine teaching. Then will each person be able to embrace the true vocation of being human.
"My food is to do the will of the One who sent me and to finish his work" (Jn 4:34).