**3rd Sunday of Lent A**

In the gospel reading for today, Jesus encounters the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. The discussion that ensues focuses on the image of water, particularly as it pertains to life, and it allows us to reflect on where the satisfaction or fulfillment of our deepest desire truly lies. As we can see with the woman’s response: *Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water*, there is a parallel between Jesus providing this “spring of water welling up to eternal life” and his providing the true bread from heaven, to which the Galilaeans responded: *Sir, give us this bread always.* Jesus is thus the provider of the new water and the new bread which nourishes the soul itself.

*Whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.* Pope Benedict points out that the biblical image of a spring is that of “water that bursts forth fresh from the womb of the earth. The spring is origin, beginning, in its as yet unclouded and unspent purity. The spring thus figures as a truly creative element, as well as being a symbol of fruitfulness, of maternity.” Jesus’ imagery, then, conjures up a notion of an overflowing of grace in and through which we are constantly being reborn.

The image of baptism, where Jesus tells Nicodemus that we must be born of water and the Spirit, is very much at the heart of this new and living water. This flowing water is the very source of our renewal, and it is that which ultimately quenches the thirst in us for God. Our soul’s deepest yearning, its deepest thirst, is for God Himself who created us so that we can never be satisfied without Him. As we read in Jeremiah: *Two evils my people have done: they have forsaken me, the source of living waters; They have dug themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.* (2:13) Thus, this endless living spring given to us by Jesus is God Himself. As the image of water in Scripture so often indicates, the wellspring within us is the Holy Spirit through whom we are constantly being refashioned in the image of Christ. In regard to this Pope Francis has said:

“In the Creed we profess with faith: “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life”… *the Holy Spirit is the inexhaustible source of God’s life in us*. Man of every time and place desires a full and beautiful life, just and good, a life that is not threatened by death, but can still mature and grow to fullness. Man is like a traveller who, crossing the deserts of life, thirsts for the living water: gushing and fresh, capable of quenching his deep desire for light, love, beauty and peace. We all feel this desire! And Jesus gives us this living water: he is the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and whom Jesus pours out into our hearts. “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly”, Jesus tells us (Jn 10:10). Jesus promised the Samaritan woman that he will give a superabundance of “living water” forever to all those who recognize him as the Son sent by the Father to save us (cf. Jn 4:5-26; 3:17). Jesus came to give us this “living water”, who is the Holy Spirit, that our life might be guided by God, might be moved by God, nourished by God. … In the Letter to the Romans we find these words: “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (5:5). The “living water”, the Holy Spirit, the Gift of the Risen One who dwells in us, purifies us, illuminates us, renews us, transforms us because he makes us participants in the very life of God that is Love.” (General Audience May 8, 2013)

It is important for us to consider this imagery in the context of Lenten fasting. Our practice of fasting is to draw us away from our material concerns – our overabundance and preoccupation with material food and drink – in order to focus on the new water and the new bread given to us so that we may find our hunger and thirst – a hunger and thirst for God and not for material things – fully satisfied. This presence of God is what, at our core, we are truly seeking, and it is that which we find in the heavenly food and drink which God himself provides for us: *Whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.* As we continue through this Lent, therefore, let us ever open ourselves up to the gift that Christ has presented to us, the spring of water welling up to eternal life which is the Holy Spirit, the source of God’s life in us.