

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT (Year A)
3-8-2026 Homily

I. Introduction

Many years ago, a ship journeying across the Atlantic Ocean to South America was in great distress for a very simple reason: its supply of fresh water had run out. The crew was surrounded by sea water, but because of its salt content it was undrinkable, and so they were facing a horrible death by thirst and dehydration. Then, when it seemed their situation was hopeless, they spotted a ship approaching them from South America, so they hoisted distress signals explaining their situation and begging for water. The other ship signaled back, “Dip up a bucket of water.” The thirsty crew was stunned at first, then livid with rage; they were almost literally dying of thirst, but the other ship was cruelly mocking them by telling them to dip up a bucket of useless sea water. Hoping they misunderstood, the crew signaled back again, but they received the same answer: “Dip it up.” Finally in despair they lowered a bucket, and you can imagine their amazement and delight when it turned out to be fresh, living water. What the thirsty crew didn’t know was that they were near the mouth of the mighty Amazon River, whose fresh water flows far out to sea (Donald Deffner, *Seasonal Illustrations*, p. 114).

Many people today are desperately thirsting for love, forgiveness, and meaning in life, not realizing that the solution is all around them and that they need only reach out to it. The grace of Jesus Christ is always available to us, and in effect the Church says to us, “Dip it up.” This Lenten truth is both a reminder and invitation to us, and a message of good news we’re called to share with others.

II. Development

Here in Michigan we have an appreciation of the importance of water, for we’re surrounded by the largest bodies of fresh water to be found anywhere on our planet. As necessary as water is in a physical sense, so infinitely more is God’s grace necessary in a spiritual sense—and today’s readings speak of His eagerness to provide this grace. When the people grumbled against Moses because of their thirst, the Lord provided water for them—but this was merely a foretaste of what He would one day do for all His children in a wonderful and everlasting way. As St. Paul tells us in the Letter to the Romans, God loved us enough to send Jesus to die for us even though we were sinners; our hope for redemption has been fulfilled, for “the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. . . .”

Jesus spoke of this truth in a powerful and inspiring way to the Samaritan woman. It seemed He was the one in need of help, for He asked for a drink—but in fact, He was offering her a spiritual, life-giving water that would cleanse her from her many sins and lead her to eternal life. Fortunately, the woman was not stubborn or shy; she was a little defensive at first, but was willing to listen to Jesus, to believe in His words, and to accept His invitation to receive new life through repenting of her sins and having faith in Him. The Samaritan woman believed in Him as the Messiah; not only did she find the love, forgiveness, and purpose she sought, but she also shared this wonderful news with the people in her town. This is the sort of response Jesus is seeking from each one of us.

III. Conclusion

If we were to look for the biggest single factor in predicting whether or not a person was happy in life, we wouldn't have to look very far—the answer is all around us. People who attend church as part of a firm commitment and loving response to God tend to be much more satisfied with life than those who don't. This simple truth is borne out statistically. For instance, alcohol abuse is 300% higher among non-churchgoers than among those who do go to church, and churchgoers are much less likely ever to attempt suicide than those who lack this sort of spiritual and emotional support. People who are active in a religion tend to live longer than those who aren't, and are also healthier, suffering fewer heart attacks and having lower blood pressure than non-religious people. As a rule, churchgoers are more likely to be happily married, and thus have a lower divorce rate; they are less likely to suffer from depression, and have even been shown to have higher incomes, than their non-churchgoing counterparts. Overall, people who value and practice their religion are statistically five times more likely to be happy than people who don't.

A loving relationship with Jesus Christ can do more for our self-esteem and peace of mind than anything else we might try. He is the Source of all life, and as He once said, He came that we might have life and have it abundantly. As Christians, we know this is true, but sometimes in the midst of our worries and problems and the burdens of life, we need to be reminded of this truth. Even more importantly, we have the duty and privilege of sharing this good news with those around us.

I think this means three things in particular. First of all, we must give a good example; we must let our society see that being a Christian makes a difference in life. We need to give an ongoing example of hope, trust, and compassion so that people will be attracted to our faith; because we are ambassadors of Jesus, we must give others the impression that following Him is a joyful experience, not a sad one. Secondly, we must use any opportunities we're given to influence others, especially by helping people in their vulnerable moments: consoling the grieving, offering advice and support to the lonely and confused, responding generously to those in need. Being there when someone needs us is a way to help that person discover the truth of the Gospel. Thirdly, we must always pray for the conversion of those who are rejecting or ignoring Christ, even if it doesn't seem to be having any effect. Prayer is powerful, and it can make a major difference when the people we pray for choose between the way of Jesus and the way of this world in an effort to quench their spiritual thirst.

So many people are desperately searching for spiritual peace and a purpose in life—and you and I must bear witness to the truth that the solution is all around them. Jesus alone is the Source of living water, and this grace is available to anyone who seeks it. May we always make use of this gift gratefully and humbly, and invite others to do the same.