

## Third Sunday of Lent A - God Thirsts

Mar 8, 2026

This is “wet” Sunday because all three readings give us the image of water. In the first reading, the Israelites are thirsting for water in the wilderness. In the second reading Paul tells us that the love of God has been “poured out” into our hearts. In the gospel, we have the well known story of the “woman at the well”. Water is one of the most basic needs in our life, without it we cannot survive. Water also initiates us into Christian life. It is through the water of baptism that we became who we are: members of the body of Christ and heirs of the reign of God. Every third Sunday of Lent, in all three years of the liturgical cycle, we will come to Jacob’s well to witness the conversion of the Samaritan woman. The Church thinks that this Gospel passage is so important that we read it every year, without fail, during Lent. Why is this scene so important? In the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, we see God himself asking a woman for a drink. And this woman is an outcast. Jesus is breaking barriers to build relationship. Later on, Jesus will again ask for a drink. He did this on the cross. On Good Friday, he will say: “I thirst”. In essence, we must understand that John is telling us that God wants us. God chooses us. God longs for our love because God loves us despite our sinfulness. There is a depth of love for us that fills the heart of God. Every Lent, we truly need to hear that as a thirsty man yearns for water, so God yearns for us; as a thirsty man seeks after water, so God seeks after us; as a thirsty man thinks only of water, so God thinks of us. We often don’t think of God as needing anything. How could he need our love in any real way? Regardless of how we define God’s nature in the abstract as impassable and unchangeable, we must see that Christ, the one who needs nothing, has voluntarily made himself needy, but only in order to communicate to us the life that is his. Jesus gave the woman, and us, hope and offered nothing less than the living waters of friendship and the Spirit of God which leads to eternal life.

The truth of the matter is that God loves us, but he is also in love with us. This was the discovery of the Samaritan woman. She never knew how much she was loved and was searching for love in all the wrong places. As she sets aside her water jug, symbolizing her old way of life, she begins a new life as a disciple of Jesus. All because she finally understood God’s love. Do we understand God’s love? Very often, we think Christianity is about doing something good to please God. No, it is about what has already been done for us by a loving God. We don’t have to do good works to earn God’s favour in order to win a ticket to heaven. Rather, our good works should express our gratitude to a loving God - a God who loves us so much that he sent his only son to die for us in order to make us deserving. But he also chose to leave us free to believe this good news, that too is a sign of his love and respect for us.

Biblically, the Samaritans were a distinct ethnic and religious group inhabiting the central region of ancient Israel, known as Samaria (between Galilee in the north and Judea in the south). The Samaritans developed slowly, starting around 722 BC. It was then that the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel. The Assyrians deported many of the Israelites to other lands, but they also brought in foreigners from places like Babylon. These immigrants intermarried with the remaining Israelites, creating a mixed population. Their mixed cultures produced a hybrid religion. The newcomers adopted some Jewish customs, such as the worship of Yahweh and the Pentateuch, but they also blended it with pagan practices from Babylon. St. Augustine points out that the Samaritan Woman portrays not merely as a historical figure but as a “figure of the Church not yet justified, but now about to be justified.” She embodies all of humanity, fractured yet redeemable, her transformation prefigures the Church as Christ’s bride, embracing all nations in divine mercy. All of humanity shares a thirst for the divine, a sinful past, and a longing for eternal life. Jesus’ offer of “living water” represents the Holy Spirit’s eternal gift. For Augustine, this quenches humanity’s innate thirst, uniting diverse peoples in baptismal grace. Pope Benedict XVI noted that the story of the Samaritan woman has special meaning for catechumens preparing for Baptism, which he called the source of new life. Benedict emphasized

that Jesus entrusted the woman with the rare revelation of his identity as the Messiah, leading her to leave her water jar behind—a symbol of leaving the past to proclaim the Joy of the Gospel.

Pope Francis encouraged the faithful to bring their own "burden of history" to the Lord, to allow themselves to be refreshed by Him, and to overcome the "culture of indifference" by recognizing the "cry" of those who, like the Samaritan woman, are searching for meaning, closeness, and attention. He pointed out this encounter transformed the woman to become a witness to others, highlighting that true evangelization flows from being understood and forgiven. We too can be like her to carry out our missionary discipleship. The Pope emphasized that Jesus waits for us at the "crossroads" of our lives, just as He did for the Samaritan woman, regardless of how complicated or ruined our history might seem. By speaking to a Samaritan woman, Jesus breaks all social, religious, and gender prejudices of the time. Jesus's knowledge of her difficult past is not for judgment, but rather a starting point for healing. The woman represents all who are "wounded" and in need of God's grace. A good example for us is Mother Teresa who found her vocation and mission in life within the words of Jesus on the cross: "**I thirst**". The thirst of Jesus on the cross was her entranceway to God. Because she knew she needed God above all else, her life was spent trying to quench his thirst. She did this by loving the poorest of the poor. Mother Teresa changed the city of Calcutta by her good works. We do not have to go to Calcutta to find God or the poor. Calcutta symbolizes a darkness that is everywhere. Every man holds in his heart a little Calcutta, the streets of Calcutta arriving at every man's door. We thus can find God in our own misery and problems. We can find God in service to our neighbour. We are to be a light that changes the Calcutta of the world. The Samaritan woman became a missionary in her village, spent her life sharing her experience with Christ. She changed her village forever. We can do this as well, with our charitable good works. In so doing, we are quenching the thirst of God and perhaps our thirst for God as well. Like St. Augustine said, "Our hearts are restless until we rest in thee."

Like David's longing for God when he was in the wilderness of Judah, let's long for our God in the wilderness of our life:

"O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have look upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live, I will lift up hands and call on your name. My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips when I think of you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me..." (Psalm 63)

God thirsts for us! What is our thirst?