

**Homily for February 27, 2005
Third Sunday of Lent (A)
By Father Charles Bowes**

**Exodus 17:3-7
Psalm 95:1-2, 6-9
Romans 5:1-2, 5-8
John 4:5-42**

We, too, thirst for the living God.

Just a reminder that the second of our regional communal Reconciliation services takes place at 7:30 p.m. this coming Tuesday evening at Saint Bartholomew Church just down the street. More information about this and other area reconciliation services is in the bulletin. We had our first regional service last Monday evening at Saint James in White Oak, and all five of the pastors of our region served as confessors. So, we're publicly underway in our collaborative efforts, and there will be more to come.

During the 9:00 a.m. Mass this Sunday, the first of the three Scrutiny rites is celebrated for the Elect, the catechumens who will be baptized at the coming Easter Vigil. The Gospel passages from Saint John, chapter 4, about the woman at the well, have been assigned for these scrutiny Masses with the Elect especially in mind. But they also contain messages for the rest of us as we prepare to renew our baptismal promises at Easter. Today, with the Israelites in Exodus chapter 17, we are told that God will quench our thirst, whether we realize that we are spiritually dehydrated or not. Today, we see that Jesus is the source of "living water." Today,

Saint Paul in Romans chapter 5 tells us "the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

There is no thought of our meriting these favors, no hint of earning God's love. The Israelites were undeserving; the Samaritan woman was undeserving; and we, too, are undeserving. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." What matters is whether or not we are thirsty...and if we are thirsty, whether or not we know where to find "living water." Psalm 95 reminds us how necessary it is to be ever open to the goodness of God. "Oh, that today you would hear [God's] voice." We have enjoyed God's goodness in the past. We are invited to trust that this goodness will continue. Therefore, we are to be open to new challenges, to new opportunities to cross beyond restrictive boundaries.

As children, we were taught that Lent meant that we should "give up" candy or movies, that we should "do penance," say certain prayers or "make the Way of the Cross." But Lent is more than a time for subtracting or adding. It calls us to look first at what God has done and continues to do for us. Out of love for us, God "called us to a holy life." Out of love for us, Jesus "destroyed death and brought life and immortality." Out of love for us, God gave us his beloved Son that we might "listen to him." Responding to God's loving

kindness will require some kind of transformation in all of us. Hence, penance enters the picture. It may be necessary that we give up much more than candy or movies; it may be necessary that we travel to a real way of the cross. But we will accept these challenges in response to God's goodness, not as a sign of ours.

Perhaps the first penance to perform for Lent is that of thankfulness – thankfulness to God for all that God does and has done.

These scrutiny Sundays are wonderful Lenten opportunities to look deeply into our own hearts. Have they become hardened like the hearts of those who take God's goodness for granted? Do we test God, even though we have seen and experienced God's marvelous deeds in our lives? Or are we like the Samaritan woman, caught in the complexities of life but open to new insights, to conversion of mind and heart, to opportunities for bringing others to Jesus? How thirsty are we? Perhaps our prayer today could be simply that of the Samaritan woman, "Sir, give me this living water."

We, too, thirst for the living God.