

The 3rd Sunday of Lent - Year A – 3/8/2026 – Msgr. Peter Quang Nguyen

First Reading – Exodus 17:3-7: The Israelites, thirsty and doubting God’s presence, quarrel with Moses. God instructs Moses to strike a rock at Horeb, miraculously providing water, and the place is named “Massah” and “Meribah.”

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 95: Let us joyfully sing and worship the Lord, our creator and shepherd. I urge openness to His voice today, unlike our ancestors who hardened their hearts despite witnessing His works.

Second Reading – Romans 5:1-2, 5-8: Through faith, we are made right with God, gaining peace and the hope of sharing His glory. God’s love, given through the Holy Spirit, affirms this hope, shown in Christ dying for us as sinners.

Gospel – John 4:5-42: In Samaria, Jesus met a Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. He asked her for water, leading to a conversation about “living water” offering eternal life. Jesus’s insight into her life convinced her of his prophetic nature. He revealed the future of worship transcending locations, focusing on Spirit and truth. Declaring himself the Messiah, his interaction led many Samaritans to believe in him as the Savior of the world.

My Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Today’s Gospel is like a romantic story about Jesus who, in the midday heat, meets a woman Samaria and asks her for water, in a situation of difference in homeland, race, culture, religion, and even overcoming prohibitions against meeting. In fact, this may simply be an allegory about life that the authors of the fourth Gospel skillfully presented to convey the meaning of boundless longing and the true way of worshipping God.

1. Thirst for God.

There are desires that make human life better after they are achieved, but there are also many satisfactions that make human conditions worse. Humans are born within limitations, yet possess boundless longing. And to quench that thirst, some deceive themselves by creating idols to worship, only to be disappointed; others seek to fill that thirst by indulging in material pleasures ... but then feel bored, never truly satisfied. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman: “*Whoever drinks from this well will still thirst ...*” This water does not completely quench thirst; it both soothes and sustains, and even intensifies it.

The image of the Samaritan woman living with five husbands (and still claiming to have no husband) and even the sixth man living with her is not her husband (cf. John 4:17-18) is perhaps symbolic: the Israelites, through many masters, still lacked a true Master; human life worships many masters, but nothing truly satisfies the thirst for true mastery.

The Samaritan woman sought happiness through many husbands, but none of them could bring her true happiness. Her search for happiness was like fetching water. Every day she had to trudge to a distant well, fill her jar, only to be thirsty again the next day and continue carrying the jar. Though she didn't realize it, she was tormented by a thirst that worldly relationships couldn't quench, couldn't alleviate. The deeper she delved into the sea of love, the more she felt deprived.

The image of the Samaritan woman carrying her jar to fetch water from the deep well, along with the bucket she used to draw water, symbolizes the persistent thirst. Even though people create all sorts of means to satisfy their desires, the thirst never truly ends. The poor want to be rich, the rich want to be even richer, and so the search continues. It can be said that the hunger for gold, silver, and wealth is just one of countless hungers and thirsts that torment and kill tens of thousands of people. How many thirsts for misguided passions, for carnal pleasures, for money and fame have pushed so many into the abyss? The deeper they sink into the abyss, the more insane they become, losing their character and humanity. They are mistaken, because all those things can never satisfy the thirst in their hearts. Because they are greedy and insatiable, the well of greed only leads to disappointment and despair.

Who doesn't know the insidious cycle of desire, always recurring, never satisfied? Who wouldn't feel an inexhaustible urge to satisfy their desires, driving them to indulge in some way: the thirstier they are, the more they drink; the more they drink, the thirstier they become ...

Father *Anthony de Mello* also observed similarly: *“Satisfying desires does not free us from them, but creates another, even more intense desire, thus creating a vicious cycle: craving – satisfaction, satisfaction – craving ... continuing endlessly ... and becoming increasingly intense. And so, people suffer torment and burning with the fire of desire within them.”*

The German philosopher Schopenhauer discovered: *“The pleasures the world offers are like a handful of rice given to a beggar; they only alleviate hunger today, and tomorrow the hunger returns.”*

Ultimately, material desires can never truly satisfy a person, encompassing both body and soul, spirit and matter; therefore, the eternal is needed. This means that besides natural and instinctive thirst, humans also have desires that nothing in the world can satisfy. This is called boundless thirst. ***This is a spiritual thirst, and no water in the world can quench it.***

And Jesus answered: *“Whoever drinks this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst again. And the water I give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life”* (John 4:13-14).

Yes, only Christ, who is God, can fill this boundless thirst, for when one has God, one no longer seeks fleeting things. This is truly as Saint Augustine said of old, after a lifetime of searching for fame, status, wealth, love, and happiness, finally becoming weary, repenting, and returning to God, exclaiming: *“Lord, you created me for Yourself, yet all this time I have been preoccupied with seeking something else outside*

of You. Therefore, my heart was restless until it found rest in You. Lord, how late I came to know you! How late I came to love you!"

The Samaritan woman went to the well every day to draw water, drank from it, avoided meeting many people (*no one come to the well at noon time*), lived with many husbands, yet her thirst remained. Only today, upon hearing the "Word of Life" from Jesus, did she realize the truth about herself and was transformed; She has learned how to worship God correctly, and what is true Spirit and truth.

2. Worshipping God in Spirit and Truth.

With the skillful presentation of the Gospel, what we can easily see here is that Jesus simultaneously eliminated two divisions: (1) racial discrimination between Jews and Samaritans, and (2) the difference between living a religious life "in the church" and living a religious life "in the Spirit."

These discriminations originated from the conflict between the North and South of Israel (-931), when the North (with its capital Samaria) erected an altar of a golden calf instead of worshipping God (1Kings 12:26-33); then, when Israel (the North) was exiled (-721), the Assyrian king brought other groups of people to the land of the then-Northern capital, Samaria, to settle, thus creating a diverse and multicultural and religious people. From these things, the Jews had reason to despise Samaria as "heretics," "mixed-race," and a land of uncleanness, and they excommunicated each other: the Jews established laws prohibiting "native Jews" from associating with "foreigners" to avoid contamination; while Samaria forbade Jews from traveling through their territory, forcing them to take a detour. Therefore, today, the woman was astonished when Jesus came to ask her for water, but Jesus took the first step to break down the long-standing barrier between the two sides. Jesus' action surprised the woman: *"You are a Jew, and you ask me, a Samaritan woman, for water?"* (John 4:9).

The Samaritan woman here did not belong to a foreign religion, but had Jewish roots dating back to the time of the North-South division. She believed in the God of Abraham, like the Jews, but "did not go to the church in Jerusalem," but rather to the church built on the mountain by the Samaritans, dating back to the time of the religious schism. Upon meeting Jesus, the woman not only wanted Him to arbitrate her questions about cultural and religious differences, but also about the proper way to worship God: *"Sir, I see you are a prophet... Our ancestors worshiped God on this mountain; yet you say, 'Jerusalem is the place where God should be worshiped.'"* Jesus said, *"Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem"* (John 4:19-21).

Jesus gave the answer, affirming that God is never confined: *"The hour is coming when you will worship God not on this mountain or in Jerusalem, but in spirit and truth."* God is never the exclusive God of one person or one nation, because He is the common Father of all people everywhere and at all times. No one person, no nation, and no religion have the right to claim Him exclusively for themselves, or to think that God is only present in their country or in their temple.

God is spirit, and since spirit is invisible, it is everywhere. God is present everywhere. God is Love, which transcends time and space, so He is not limited to “in the church” or outside of society. Similarly, it is not the case that people who enter church appear pious but leave it worse than the pagans. Living a religious life means always being aware of God's presence everywhere and always trying to please Him.

God in truth is worshipped only when people respect the truth. Worshiping God is not limited to outward rituals but is manifested in life.

Once we are convinced that God is the common Father of all, no one should use His name to cause division and hatred; instead, we must love and unite with one another in His name. Indeed, for Jesus, the deepest and most complete way to express our love for God is to love our brothers and sisters.

It is important to distinguish that the above meanings do not advocate for "keeping faith in one's heart" while neglecting worship and avoiding Christian duties, but rather for always placing oneself before God and believing in His omnipresence. This means not merely worshipping God in church or outward rituals but demonstrating it through living out one's faith everywhere and at all times with concrete actions.

In the past, the Jews isolated themselves within what they called racial and religious purity, proud of having the Temple in Jerusalem to keep the Lord of the universe for themselves and considering all other nations as godless. Today, many of us still hold proud notions of "church faith," confining God to the church, considering ourselves the "original faith," and thus failing to live out our faith in the world and bring God to others.

In short, through the story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman, Jesus initiated a revolution. A revolution in geographical distance and racial hierarchy, leading to a great revolution: *a revolution of the soul*. Thanks to this revolution of the soul, from now on, the worship of God between Jews and Samaritans can be lived and flourish, not only on this mountain or that mountain, but right in their hearts through the Spirit and truth.

In summary: today's Gospel teaches us that the DESIRE FOR GOD is the true source that fills all our desires. From this, we learn to open our hearts to remove all barriers and reach out to others to proclaim the WORSHIP OF ONE TRUE GOD, just as the Samaritan woman, after meeting Jesus, left everything behind to run into the village to tell everyone and lead them to meet Jesus, and all were transformed.

Lord Jesus, we ourselves are building barriers that separate us from You and our fellow human beings. Grant that we may always overcome these barriers of prejudice and hatred, so that we may build unity, always open our hearts to receive You into our lives, and thus satisfy our spiritual thirst for perfect happiness in You. Amen.