

*Jesus answered and said to her,
"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again;
but 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."
The woman said to him,
"Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty
or have to keep coming here to draw water.*



Last summer, I experienced thirst like I never had before. I always liked to drink diet sodas, juices and water but now I felt like I was a camel preparing to go for a long journey across the desert. I was in search of great water bottles that could hold two quarts of water which I would quickly drink and then refill. My thirst never was satisfied. Now, I did come to know that drinking such prodigious amounts of water led me to the exact location of every restroom within 50 miles of Bethpage. After two months or so of this thirst addiction, I went to the doctor and found out that I had diabetes. At first I was very discouraged about this diagnosis, but over time, with a great change in my diet and some medication, I am doing very well, and my bloods tests are very good, I have stopped asking every gas attendant in Long Island for the keys to their rest rooms.

I learned that my intense thirst was telling me something very important and I needed to pay attention to it. For me, thirst was a powerful teacher and may well have helped me from really damaging my health. I am sure you learned in biology class that more than half our bodies are made up of water. You can live a few minutes without air, though we don't recommend trying. In a [harsh environment](#) — it's snowing, say — you have several hours 3 hours to survive without shelter. After 3 days, you need water or you'll perish. You can make it 3 weeks without food, though we promise you that won't be fun. I am not sure how long one can live without chocolate or pizza, but I am beginning to learn that.

I remember when my mother was in her last years, there were a few times that my sister and I brought Mom to the emergency room because she was acting in very disorientated ways. The first time this happened, we were afraid that she had a stroke which was also the initial diagnosis of the doctors. However, it turned out that she had a tendency to get dehydrated. The hospital staff would give Mom and an IV and she

would soon be back to normal. Occasionally, as this happened again, the doctors would immediately want to test her for a stroke, and my family would ask for IV and that would solve the issue. Water is essential to our lives. Water is such a basic of life. Every diet and nutritionist suggest that we drink about eight glasses of water a day for good health. I am not sure if beer counts or not.

I have lived in Bethpage for almost six years, and there is concern in the town about the water. There is no problem with our tap water, but there is concern that the water table well below the surface may have possibly been polluted by the Grumman Corporation. Recently, in the parking lot adjacent to the Church, the government did some drilling, and the parishioners teased me that I was drilling for oil. But we know that clean water is not laughing matter, and very often the poor in the third world suffer greatly from a lack of good water.

Today, in our Gospel, a Samaritan woman does what people have done since the beginning of time, and still do in many parts of the world. Like all human beings, she needed water to live. But she goes to the well at a very odd time of the day, at noontime in the heat of the day. It was the custom of the women, as the men were home having their coffee and reading Long Island Newsday or watching ESPN, to go as a group in the early morning, before the heat of the day, to draw their water in as many buckets as they could carry. We can almost hear them talking about the local news and perhaps, a few complaining about their husbands.

But this unnamed woman is at the well alone in the heat of the day, and probably cups the first drawn water into her own hands to allay her thirst before she makes the lonely trip back to the village with her heavy buckets. A stranger approaches her and ask for a drink. I am sure most of us have had the experience of a stranger asking us for money in New York. Although I am a Catholic priest, and like all Christians, called to see Jesus in the face of the poor, my first instantaneous reactions are to walk away, be annoyed or afraid of the person. However, very often, either my faith or my Irish guilt take hold and I give the person a dollar. As a sidebar, Pope Francis is in recent interview said that we should give something to every person who asks. The interviewer inquired, *what if they are going to spend the money on wine?* The Pope said, *so what, let them have a little joy in their lives.* I love the pope but if I give to every stranger in New York who asks me for money, I will soon need to ask others for money!

This woman is clearly annoyed with the stranger. She quickly sizes him up as a trouble. Most likely, in her experience, strange men have caused her nothing but problems. Even worse, he is a Jew and Jews hate Samaritans whom they consider religious traitors deserving of utter contempt. Also, in the Mid-Eastern culture, as is still true today in some of those Mid-Eastern countries even today, a woman is not to ever be seen in public with a man who not a blood relative. They could be several punished for such behavior. His desire for a drink is fraught with danger for her. She believes this encounter is not going to go well for her.

She tries sarcasm: *"How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?"* —*For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.* But the stranger is persistent in his thirst. He answered and said to her, *"If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink, 'you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."* Again, she resorts to cynicism: *you don't have a bucket. What are you talking about.* Again, he speaks to her in a way that no man has ever spoken to her. His words about living water are captivating. Imagine, she thinks to herself, never being thirsty again. The stranger has her attention. *Sir, notice now the term of respect she has, I want that water. I can see you are a holy man.* Now, the man gets personal with her, and asks where is your husband? At first glance this is a devastating question; it cuts her to the core of her being, but he has asked not as an accuser but in a gentle trusting way. She speaks softly, *I have no husband.* He nods with compassion: *that is true, you have had five husbands and the one you are with now is not your husband.* Now, we know why she is alone at noon and not with the other women before the heat of the day. Women generally do not like women with five husbands. After a lifetime of pain, ridicule, rejection, and heartache, this man has spoken to her in way that no other human being ever has. The woman says to him, *"I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Christ; when he comes, he will tell us everything."* Jesus said to her, *"I am he, the one who is speaking with you."* Human thirst had made a bond between the Son of God and a sinner and she experiences the love and mercy of God. She is no longer a promiscuous woman but a child of God embraced in compassion by the love and mercy of God's son. She is so transformed by this encounter with the Living God at the well that she rushes to town, the town where she is publicly ridiculed, to announce the Gospel of Jesus Christ. She went to a well for water and found the living God.

We are good people seeking to follow Jesus. We have times of great joy and happiness in our lives, but we do have our struggles at times. Loved one have died and we miss them terribly. For some our marriages may have ended in divorce and others feel a distance where there was once a deep bond. Our children and grandchildren, good kids, but many of them have left the faith we worked so hard to give them. The daily news with stories of anger, accusations, protests, name calling, threats of terrorism makes us wonder about the future. None of us can escape worry about our health, our finances, and what is to come. I have been going to Church and being a Catholic all my life but I sometimes long to meet Jesus in a way that this unnamed Samaritan woman met him 2000 years ago on a hot afternoon at a well. Whether we know it or not, we are thirsty for God, and, God is thirsty for us. On the cross on Good Friday, Jesus says, *I thirst.* Our Lord certainly thirsts from a lack of water and the loss of blood, but there is a far deeper meaning to his thirst: he thirsts for us his people, that we know him and his love. There are so many wells in our lives where God is waiting to give us his living waters. There are here in our churches, in the Scriptures, the Sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist, in our relationships, our joys and sorrows, and in our prayers. Jesus is thirsty for us to know his love. Our thirst is only satisfied by the living water of Jesus.