

“A Refreshing Pentecost”

John 7:37-39

June 8, 2014

The Day of Pentecost

Summer is coming soon. With that comes long, hot, dry, days. With the heat and the dryness comes thirst. Think of a time when you were mowing the lawn, playing golf, out on the beach, and so on and felt a tremendous thirst. Thirst is not only an uncomfortable feeling, but it is a warning – a warning that, left unchecked, the lack of hydration means death. We will die without enough water.

When the thirst becomes bad, we naturally try to quench it. Some things that we like only make the thirst worse. Try eating a bag of potato chips when you are thirsty and see if that helps. Some things which have the necessary H₂O don't help either. Try drinking a hot cup of coffee on a hot summer day.

But if someone comes with a five gallon jug of ice cold water for us, THAT will help. We leave behind, not only our thirst, but our own methods of quenching that thirst in order to embrace our benefactor and the gift of water that he brings. Think of how good it feels to have your thirst quenched in that manner. Think of how much stronger and healthier you feel after drinking some of that cool clear water. Think of how dead you aren't after your thirst is quenched and your body properly hydrated.

Physical thirst is a metaphor for our human condition. We find ourselves “thirsty” for many things – happiness, success, love, peace, and so on. Our world offers various “thirst quenchers” to help us: money to buy happiness, self-centered competition to gain success, sex to get love, compromise to achieve peace. Some of the world's thirst quenchers are bad and never work – like eating a bag of potato chips when you are physically thirsty. Some seem to work, but often just make the problem worse – like drinking sea water when cast adrift at sea. It tastes like a thirst quencher but only makes things worse and eventually will kill you.

The question we have to ask before we try to quench spiritual thirsts like this is: why do we have these spiritual thirsts in the first place? It all originates in sin. When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, it was not because they were lacking food. The devil had tempted them to be dissatisfied with God and believe that God was holding out on them, not giving them everything that they needed. They were thirsty for what they didn't have - equality with God and a knowledge of good and evil – not because they needed those things, but because they doubted God.

The same is true for us today. The temptations we face are not so much to deliberately do something wrong, but to doubt God and His Word, be dissatisfied with what God has given us, and disbelieving that we have all that we need. We think that money, material goods, and status or a wrong use of God's good gifts can satisfy our inner cravings. We seek quenching apart from God and His will. Therefore, our thirst is never completely and finally quenched

In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus offers true and lasting quenching for all of our thirsts and He uses water as an illustration and metaphor for it. Jesus is in Jerusalem and attending the Feast of Tabernacles, one of the three Jewish feasts which all Jewish male adults were required to attend every year. This feast was a celebration of God's provision of water from a rock to His thirsty people in the desert.

A tradition arose in the feast in which the High Priest would lead a procession to the pool of Siloam where he would fill a golden pitcher with water and then return to the Temple where he would pour out the water on the altar. On the seventh and final day, the high priest would do this seven times, representing the abundance of water with which the Lord quenched His people's thirsts.

This tradition had three meanings – past, present, and future. The tradition remembered God's past mercy in providing water in the desert. The tradition embodied the present day prayer for water for crops. The tradition also looked to the future when the Messiah would come and satisfy His people so that they would never thirst again.

On the last day of the feast – the great day – Jesus makes an astounding offer, “If anyone thirsts, let him come *to me* and drink.” The answer to all of our thirsts is not to be found in anything in this world, no matter how much we desire it and no matter how much we think it will satisfy us. The quenching of our thirst is to be found only in Jesus and in the living water which He came to bring.

By loudly making this declaration during the feast, Jesus was also making a bold claim. He was the Messiah who was to come and permanently satisfy His people’s thirsts by bringing them living water. As Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well, “whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again.” (John 4:14)

We don’t have to speculate about what this living water is. The Gospel writer tells us flat out: it is the Holy Spirit whose sending we celebrate here on the Day of Pentecost. However, when Jesus spoke these words, the Holy Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified. And Jesus would only be glorified when He fulfilled His Father’s mission on the cross. Calvary is the necessary prelude to Pentecost.

Jesus’ death on a cross was not a shameful tragedy as it appeared to be, but a glorious victory when seen through the eyes of faith. Jesus’ death did away with death for all who would believe. The sacrifice of His life on the cross would take away sin, the cause of death, both physical and spiritual, by placating the wrath of God and earning forgiveness for all of our sins in place of the punishment which they deserved.

Jesus’ resurrection three days later was more than a postscript tacked on to Good Friday or merely a happy ending to a sad story. The resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us life. The resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us life before the grave by giving us a new life. In our baptism, as Paul writes, our sinful life is crucified and buried with Christ and, “just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:4)

The resurrection of Jesus Christ also gives us life after death. We are united with Christ by virtue of our baptism. Because He rose from the dead and lives, we, too, shall rise from our graves

and live forever in the presence of Jesus. We need never fear or despair, regardless of anything which happens to us. Even if the worst happens and we die, we still win. Death cannot defeat us. The grave cannot hold us.

From Good Friday and Easter, we move on to Pentecost when Jesus first sent the Holy Spirit to bring the benefits of His death and resurrection to His disciples. As we heard in our second reading, through the sound of a mighty rushing wind and the sight of tongues of fire, the Holy Spirit came to and filled these disciples. Their thirst for the fulfillment of Jesus' promises was quenched. They were refreshed by the coming of the Holy Spirit and preached the Good News to the thousands of festival pilgrims in the city with the result that 3,000 souls were added to the Christian Church.

Peter, in his sermon, showed how we might share in that gift as well. When hearers asked how they should respond to the Word of God as preached by Peter, he told them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)

In Holy Baptism, we, too, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and, through the Holy Spirit, we receive all the gifts He has for us. The Holy Spirit, working through the water of baptism, washes away our sins, applies the forgiveness of sin which Jesus won for us on the cross, and creates the faith to receive these wonderful gifts. Our thirst to know God, be at peace with God, and enjoy the presence of God in our lives has been quenched.

But that's not all! Our desire to be renewed and refreshed by the Holy Spirit is also met as He dwells within us, influencing and leading our attitudes and actions, transforming them to be like more Christ-like. Paul writes to the Galatians, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control;" (Gal. 5:22) Those attitudes, in turn, transform our actions. By the power of the Holy Spirit living in us, we love and serve our God by loving and serving our neighbor.

The Holy Spirit not only fills us, refreshes us, and quenches our spiritual thirst, it moves from us to others. Jesus says of the one who drinks of the Spirit and believes in Him, “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” The Holy Spirit flows out of us and to others as we direct them to the source of that Holy Spirit, namely, the Word of God. As we speak the Word of God to those around us and lead them here to hear the Word of God, the Holy Spirit has the opportunity to quench their thirsts and renew their lives as well.

And when our spiritual lives become parched (and they will) and we feel spiritually tired and spent (as we will), we can always drink again of that same Spirit as we continue to hear the Word of God in the preaching, and taste the Word of God in the Sacrament. That’s why we come here. It’s a spiritually dry and desolate world out there. Many people, including some Christians, are thirsting to death and don’t even know it. We come here, parched and thirsty, weak and weary, so that He would give us to drink of His Spirit, quenching our thirsts, and to renew and refresh us for the week ahead.

So, don’t be thirsty. Don’t be worn out. Come, drink deeply and often from the fountains of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit will quench your thirst, refresh your faith, and renew you in your life and service to Him! Amen.