

March 19, 2017 Quenching Our Thirst Homily: Brothers and sisters, Andersonville, Georgia is the site of a one time Confederate prisoner of war camp. The state has preserved the camp as a memorial park. During the American Civil war over forty-five thousand Union soldiers were interned there as prisoners. According to scholars, the camp was at times crowded to four times its capacity. Over thirteen thousand soldiers died in the camp. Malnourished and weakened by bodily fatigue, many of the soldiers succumbed to various illnesses, such as scurvy and dysentery. And because of the inadequate water supply, many suffered the indignity of dying of thirst. Even today, tourists can spot deep holes around the older trees on the property where the desperate soldiers dug wells with their bare hands, hoping to discover sources of water. Dying of thirst is certainly not a pleasant way to exit this life.

In today's readings, thirst is a key theme. In the Old Testament reading, we are told that "In their thirst for water, the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "Why did you ever make us leave Egypt? Was it just to have us die here of thirst with our children and our livestock". (Ex17:3) In the encounter with the Samaritan woman, the topic of Christ's thirst comes out. Exhausted and thirsty, he approaches the woman as a beggar. "Jesus said to her, give me a drink". (Jn.4:7) But, as St. Augustine instructs us, Jesus is thirsting for more than drinking water. He wants the Samaritan woman's faith, commitment to him. Jesus knows the value of every single soul. Every human being is as important as the entire universe. It is worth noting that at the entrance of the chapel of Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity are the words, "I thirst", the very words uttered by Christ on the cross!

The unnamed Samaritan woman is someone to be pitied. A woman of questionable character, she has suffered through many broken relationships. Her chance meeting with Christ was remarkably fortuitous. Samaritans and Jews did not get along. So, for Christ to be alone with a foreigner and woman was enough to cause a stir in the local neighborhood. In truth, she represents the whole human race. Jesus is waiting for us as well!

The French Canadian writer, Jean Vanier, offers a sublime reflection on Christ's encounter with the Samaritan woman. He writes, "If we are not honest about ourselves, Jesus cannot give us the water that will become in us the source of eternal life. If we believe that we are better than others, if we believe that we do not need to be healed and helped, and if we do not recognize our brokenness and inner darkness, Jesus cannot give us this living water of eternal life".

Not only does the Samaritan woman become a witness whose testimony leads others to Jesus, she also leaves behind her water jar. She will never be thirsty again! So promised Jesus..."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". (Jn.4:13-14)

Among the loveliest lines ever penned for Christian prayer are found in the writings of the poet Thomas of Celano. The words are inspired by today's gospel, "Seeking me you sat down weary, redeeming me, you bore the cross, let not such labor be in vain".

Amen!