

Thirsting for New life



“ At the very dawn of creation your Spirit breathed on the waters, making them the wellspring of all holiness. The waters of the great flood you made a sign of the waters of baptism, that make an end of sin and a new beginning of goodness. Through the waters of the Red Sea you led Israel out of slavery, to be an image of God’s holy people, set free from sin by baptism. In the waters of the Jordan your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Spirit. Your Son willed that water and blood should flow from his side as he hung upon the cross.”

From the Blessing of Water, *Rite of Baptism*

“ Water, is taught by thirst.”

Emily Dickinson (1955)

Focus for this Session

- Water, symbol of new life in Christ
- An encounter with Christ implies leading others to encounter him
- God thirsts for us



GATHER

Opening Prayer

Leader Let us spend a few moments in quiet, becoming more aware of God's presence ...
 ... God's presence in each one of us, but especially in this community, gathered in Jesus' name.
Pause for a few moments of quiet.



Suggested Song

As the Deer Longs (Psalm 42, 43)

or recite these psalm verses:

Leader Let us pray together in the words of the Psalms.

Side 1 As a deer longs for flowing streams,
 so my soul longs for you, O God.

Side 2 My soul thirsts for God,
 for the living God.

**All When shall I come and behold
 the face of God?**

Side 1 O God, you are my God, I seek you,
 my soul thirsts for you;
 my flesh faints for you,
 as in a dry and weary land where there is
 no water.

Side 2 So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
 beholding your power and glory.
 Because your steadfast love is better than life,
 my lips will praise you.

**All So I will bless you as long as I live;
 I will lift up my hands and call on your name.**

Psalm 42:1-2 and Psalm 63:1-4 [NRSV]



Living Our Faith

Share briefly your experience of putting into effect the action you chose after the last session.

BREAKING OPEN OUR STORY

Reflection

A few months ago a friend gave us a basket of mangoes as a gift. I had never eaten this fruit and had no idea that I was allergic to it. I must confess that I loved its taste but hated the effects it had on me. After one day in agony (no need to enter into details), I was so weak that the paramedics had to take me to the hospital. The doctor soon diagnosed that I was having an allergic reaction to mangoes and warned me I was totally dehydrated. Before going to the hospital, my family had encouraged me to drink a lot of fluids, but I felt so nauseous that even the thought of drinking made me feel worse. After a few hours in the emergency room I was sent home with some medication for nausea.

That night, I fainted in the bathroom because of my dehydration. I cracked my head and had to be rushed back to the hospital! A simple allergic reaction was the cause of nausea, fainting, and finally several stitches. What surprised me was that although my body was dehydrated I did not feel thirsty.

The same can happen to us spiritually. We can be spiritually dehydrated and not know it; we may not even feel that we are missing anything. We feel down, empty, exhausted, may even suffer from strange headaches, and get sick without realizing that we are thirsting for God. How often have we felt discouraged and unable to go on in the midst of a crisis, or complained about our life, job, and family? We feel depressed, and then someone helps us realize that actually things are pretty good in our life—somehow we had lost perspective.

Every time I forget that I am the Beloved of God, I become spiritually dehydrated, and it often takes “cracking my head” to remind me of who I truly am.



Invitation to Share

Take a few moments of silence to reflect on one of the following questions. Then share your reflections.

1. Share an experience of “dehydration,” of thirsting, of a deep longing for something.
2. Share an experience when someone offered you some words of comfort or quality of presence that helped quench your thirst. What happened?

BREAKING OPEN GOD’S STORY**The Word of God**

Sometime before the meeting, the leader invites members of the group to take the following parts in the proclamation of the Gospel: narrator, the voice of the Samaritan woman, and the voice of Jesus.

John 4:5-30, 39-42

“A spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”

Reader *The Gospel of the Lord.*

All **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Reflect

Moment of silent reflection

- What word, phrase, or image from the Scripture reading touches my heart or speaks to my life?

Invitation to Share

The leader invites those who so wish to echo a key word or phrase that touched them from the Scripture passage.

Reflection

The woman met Jesus at noon. That was a strange time to go to the well to draw water, because the heat was unbearable. Perhaps she went at that time to avoid other women who went in the cool of the



morning, and spent a lot of time catching up with the town gossip. When we hear about her lifestyle later, it's easy to imagine she would be the target of that gossip, and perhaps not even welcomed by the other women.

The "aha" moment of conversion

Throughout the Gospel according to John we are presented with a series of dramatic encounters between Jesus and various characters. To help underline the essential message, these encounters often have a humorous touch.

We see various characters respond to Jesus' message on a first, literal level. This week the Samaritan woman wonders aloud how this man can give her water when he doesn't even have a bucket! Next week we will see Nicodemus asking how he could go back and be born again. But these little jokes of John have a very serious purpose: they keep the conversation going.

It is only as the conversation with Jesus continues that these characters are drawn in deeper and come to an encounter not just with an interesting man who can make their present life better but with the Messiah, the Christ, sent to bring them new life.

Watch out for the "aha" moment; it will be a moment of conversion, of turning around, of change ...

John underlines the fact that this happens in Samaria and explicitly tells us how Jews did not associate with Samaritans because they regarded them as ritually impure. One key consequence: Jews were forbidden to drink from any vessel Samaritans had handled.

Add to this the fact that a man talking to a woman was a breach of basic religious and social taboo at this time and in this culture!

No wonder the woman was surprised when Jesus not only talks to her, but asks her for a drink! Out of her confusion comes a basic question to which Jesus gives a gentle reply, full

of promise, speaking of "living water." Her reply shows she is taking this stranger literally: how can he give water without a bucket? Is he talking about some other well? Again Jesus responds, and with each response he is inviting her to a new understanding, to go beyond the literal, beyond what she can see and touch. He explains that this "living water" will become in her a spring welling up to eternal life. For the first time, she does not respond with a question, but accepts the invitation: "Sir, give me this water." A first small step on her process of conversion. And yet, she is still taking Jesus literally because she speaks of never having to come back to the well.



Why would she not want to come to the well? Not just because of the tedium of drawing water but because of who she is. Jesus now gently leads her deeper into the process of leaving her old life behind and becoming a new person. The encounter continues to unfold with the questions about her husbands, questions that bring her face-to-face with herself. She timidly shared the truth about her life, which opens her up to seeing the truth about the person she is now with: he is the Messiah that deep down she is longing will come. John gives us the words of the conversation, but beyond them let us be open to glimpsing the way Jesus accepts her unconditionally, from daring to speak to her in the beginning to not condemning her for her lifestyle at the end of the encounter.

We do not know for sure how long this conversation took, but because of the heat and the return of the disciples it could not have been too long. Yet, it was enough to turn this woman's life around. For however brief a moment, there has been a profound sharing: a sharing of life experience, which leads to faith sharing. Already that is a very profound model for what we are doing in this session. By the end let us hope we, too, will have deepened our understanding, and appreciation of Jesus as

the Christ who offers us new life. But the Gospel does not end there! To what action did her faith call her? This sinful Samaritan woman became an evangelizer telling everyone in the town about Jesus! She could not contain the joy in her heart at having found Jesus, the Messiah. Her sharing, we are told, brought many in the town to believe in Jesus.

Our thirst for God; God's thirst for us

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She had five husbands and was living with another man. She made ample use of her freedom, but still did not become freer; in fact, she became emptier.

In this woman, we can see the reflection of our lives today with all the problems that involve us; but we also see how, in the depths of our hearts, there is always the question of God. God thirsts for our faith and wants us to find in him the source of our authentic happiness.

Jesus wants to lead us, like the Samaritan woman, to profess our faith in him with strength so that we can then proclaim and witness to our brothers and sisters the joy of encountering him and the marvels that his love works in our lives.”

Pope Benedict XVI

Angelus Message, Second Sunday of Lent

February 24, 2008



The Church has always associated this Gospel passage with the sacrament of baptism. A special rite, called a scrutiny, takes place on this Sunday for candidates for baptism at the Easter Vigil (see closing prayer). Baptism makes us members of the Body of Christ; it makes us a new people, disciples of Christ and members of the community of believers we call the Church. When we arise from the waters of baptism we leave behind our old life as isolated individuals and enter into the new life, as part of the family of God, to become a sister or brother to all. But as we are discovering consistently throughout this season, being baptized marks more of a beginning than an end. The process of living out our baptism means converting our old way of life into a new one; it means that we will become not just hearers of the Good News but bearers of the Good News to others. That is exactly why the word “conversion” has two meanings: what I am doing to “convert” my life, and what we are doing to lead others to “conversion”!

God's thirst for us; our thirst for God

“If you knew the gift of God!” (John 4:10). The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God’s desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God’s thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2560

The Gospel story is about thirst: the thirst of the Samaritan woman and our thirst. But it begins with Jesus’ thirst. On Good Friday we will hear again from the Gospel according to John, as Jesus from the cross gasps, “I am thirsty.” It is also about the unconditional extent of God’s thirsting for us.

As the preface which goes with this Gospel says: “Christ, in his thirst to receive the woman’s faith, awakened in her heart the fire of God’s love.” It is a mutual thirst, God longing to bring us, in Christ, to new life; us longing for God and new life in Christ. May this Lent sharpen our thirst for God so that we more readily welcome and live out—as individuals and as Church—the new life we have in Christ.

Invitation to Share

Take a few moments of silence to reflect on the following questions. Then share your reflections.

1. Share together on the ways in which the Samaritan woman expresses her conversion (In words? In actions? In both?).
2. Share briefly your experience of moments of spiritual dehydration. Share, too, what helped quench that thirst for God.
3. The Gospel tells us that the disciples are astonished to find Jesus speaking to this woman. Yet this woman proves to be an extremely effective evangelizer, bringing others to an encounter with Christ. How am I open to the surprises that God may put into my life? People that I may meet who help me on my faith journey?
4. If I met Christ at the well, what is the question Christ would ask me, the question that would bring me face-to-face with myself? What are the burdens that I long to be rid of?

INVITATION TO ACT

Sharing and being together in a small Christian community fosters growth in our faith and in our spirituality. But no communal sharing is complete without a serious commitment to putting our faith into practice.

In this session we have reflected on God's thirst for us revealed in the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. To what kind of action does this inspire us?

Some Suggestions

1. Many people, especially women, in the developing world still have to walk miles everyday for water. Research ways that the group, or perhaps even the entire parish, can help such people. For example, sponsor the gift of a water jug, a water



- purifier, a water pump, or even a water truck (see Catholic Relief Services, www.crs.org).
2. The Samaritan woman told everyone about her encounter with Christ. Share your testimony of faith with a family member or co-worker.
 3. “Prayer is the encounter of God’s thirst with ours” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2560). In your prayer this week, be more open to what God wants of you, rather than what you want of God.
 4. Ask one of the candidates for baptism at Easter in your parish to share with you what they expect of baptism. Note their reply, and use it to inform your faith-sharing discussion for the three remaining sessions of Season Two.

Closing Prayer

If possible the faith sharing should have taken place around a bowl of water set in the center of the group. If that was impractical, take time to set it up now. Also have ready small sheets of paper and pens (preferably with water-soluble ink).

Leader We gather around this water
as did the Samaritan woman at the well.
We, too, thirst for living water!
May the Word of the Lord change our lives too,
helping us to come face-to-face
with the sins and weaknesses that burden us.

The leader now invites the participants to write on a piece of paper what it is they long to leave behind, so that their hearts can be more open to God.

If necessary, the leader can prompt with examples, such as: anxiety, fear, envy, cynicism, suspicion, etc.

Explain that each person will then drop their paper into the “well” where it will dissolve.

While the people reflect and write the burden they would like to leave behind, sing or play an appropriate song.



Suggested Song

The Water I Shall Give

Conclude with the following prayer, led by one person, or recited by everyone together:

God our Father,
 keep us from relying too much on ourselves
 and never let the powers of evil deceive us.
 Free us from the spirit of falsehood
 and help us recognize what in our lives needs change
 so that, with the help of your Spirit
 and our hearts cleansed from sin
 we may ourselves advance on the way to salvation,
 and bring others with us.
 We ask this through Christ the Lord.

All **Amen.**

Adapted from the Prayer of Exorcism, First Scrutiny,
Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, 164

Looking Ahead

Prepare for the next faith-sharing meeting by reading over Session Four.

In particular:

- *read the “**Focus for this Session**” (on page 44).*
- *read the Gospel passage: **John 3:1-21**. It may help the group’s appreciation of the passage during next week’s session to invite three people to be prepared to proclaim it for the next session: one as narrator, one as the voice of Nicodemus, and one as the voice of Christ.*

