

Water is such an important necessity for the human body. There is nothing like a cold glass of water on a hot summer's day. It refreshes us, renews us, and quenches our thirst and enables us to move forward. Even as we think about water, our theme for this morning's meditation is, "Christ gives the living water of the Spirit."

In the incident recorded for us in John chapter 4 Jesus too is tired from a journey and sits beside a well when a Samaritan woman comes to draw water from the well. Jesus asks the Samaritan woman for a drink of water to quench his thirst. This Samaritan woman is quite surprised by this request because Jews would have nothing to do with Samaritans as they considered them as an impure race. Moreover, a rabbi was not meant to be talking to a woman. There was a great social divide which Jesus was bridging with this single request for water. We are all quite familiar with the way in which the caste system works in our own country. Dalits are not allowed to drink water from the wells which are earmarked for the higher caste. Jesus breaks down the barrier of race and makes himself vulnerable before this woman. Similarly, we too are called to breakdown caste differences and build bridges between people.

The second thing that we notice about Jesus is he nullifies gender bias. A Jewish rabbi was not meant to be seen talking to a Samaritan woman. Jesus builds bridges and mends gender disparity by talking to her in public and is not worried about his reputation. This gender disparity continues today in our world. On March 8 we celebrated International Women's Day but there is still a huge gender bias both in our country and in the church. Today our women are celebrating this event by leading in the service.

Last week Air India set a new record of an all women crew which travelled from Delhi to San Francisco and back circumnavigating the globe. However, these are exceptions more than the norm. We live in a patriarchal society and there is a strong gender bias within the country and within the church. In a society marked by gender discrimination and violence against women, the church has to take the lead in showing gender equality to the world.

Jesus engages in a dialogue with the Samaritan woman when she hesitates to give him water. Jesus answered her saying, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." The woman thinks that he was referring to drink that he would give after which she would not have to come back. She wonders where Jesus was going to get this drink from, as he did not even have a bucket and the well was deep.

Living water is a metaphor for God's activity in bringing people to life (Jeremiah 2:13). In the Old Testament we read Ezekiel's description of the rivers flowing from Jerusalem so that wherever the river flows there will be life. In John's gospel water is primarily a reference to the Holy Spirit who alone gives life (John 6:63).

Jesus is telling the Samaritan woman that whoever drinks this water from the well will be thirsty again. But the water he gives will quench her thirst completely and become in her a spring of water welling up to eternal life. Jesus is telling the woman that he is the Messiah and he offers her the Holy Spirit. Anyone who comes to the recognition of Jesus as a Saviour has come through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who quenches our innermost spiritual thirst and gives us life. He is the one who renews us and refreshes us. We are called to drink of the Holy Spirit this morning and quench our spiritual thirst. May we truly drink from this spring of water which wells up to eternal life.