

Homily--Jubilee

August 1, 2014

It is said,
that if you want a picture
of how God provides for God's people,
follow the trail of water through the scriptures
as we are doing throughout this annual Assembly,
and in the readings chosen for this Jubilee liturgy.

Whether offering it,
calming it,
transforming it,
or gathering us around it,
God uses water as a lavish sign of providence,
deliverance,
and grace.

It seems that God
especially loves providing water
in those places where none is readily apparent
like at Meribah.
In the dry,
barren,
and desolate spaces of our journey,
God takes delight
in bringing forth unexpected wellsprings
to sustain us in the present
and stir our hope for the path ahead.

But of particular significance
for this celebration
are the references to living water.

That is, the cold spring water
that comes from deep within the earth,
full of minerals
with healing properties.
It is a natural outflow of ground water
which bubbles forth of its own accord,
always looking for a way out --
as if driven to pour itself out.

It is this water which is referenced
in the gospel
we just heard,
which recounts a time in the life of Jesus,
(when he participated in a celebration
of the event we heard about in the first reading),
The annual celebration
of the Feast of Tabernacles or Feast of Tents -
was a joyful, pilgrim, harvest feast
similar to Thanksgiving Day-

a day of celebrating God's Providence--
in which Israel remembered
the camping journey through the desert
led by Moses on the way to the promised land.
For 7 days of this commemoration of that Exodus experience,
the Jews of Jesus' day
would camp in tents made of leafy boughs,
living on the very basics,
just like they did on their journey through the desert.

And then on the 8th day,
they would conclude with a great harvest feast,
gorge themselves on food and drink,
symbolic of entering the promised land.
Then they would return to their homes,
their jobs,
the blessings that they lived every day in that promised land.

{Perhaps,
our annual assembly is somewhat similar to that Feast of Tents,
as we gather
and remember God's Providence to us throughout our journey
which we mark in Jubilee celebrations--
(this year certainly
a visual abundance)!
and make new commitments
and hold in loving remembrance those who have gone before us.}

On each of the first 7 days of that feast,
a senior priest,
would lead a procession through the Kidron Valley
to the pool of Siloam--the primary water source in Jerusalem.
The priest took with him a golden pitcher,
which he would fill with water,
carry it back to the temple
and pour its contents over the altar.
Each time he did that,
he reminded the people
that it was God who provided for them.
It was God who provided
their very most basic need - water
from the rock which Moses struck.
God provided the life giving water they needed
in the middle of the desert.

On the very last day,
the 8th and greatest day of the feast,
however, the priest would not get water,
rather they would party together all day
symbolizing that they had arrived
in the land flowing with milk and honey,
they had arrived
at a place where there was plenty of water.

It was on that 8th day that Jesus arose,
and apparently, in the midst of the revelry
he yelled out
"If anyone is thirsty,
let them come to me and drink.
Whoever believes in me,
streams of living water will flow
from their hearts,
gushing from their hearts."

We might expect that
Jesus' invitation
to come and drink
would have been something like--
"Come and drink and
your cup will be full of water."
Or "Come and drink and in me
you will find all the living water you need"
But instead we have the prodigal,
super abundant promise of
Come and drink and you will have
streams of living water.

And that's not all--
we might expect Jesus to direct us to himself,
to the Spirit as our source of living water.
But that is not what He does--
He says
"Whoever believes in me,
streams of living water will flow from within them!"
--that is within you,
and you,
and you,
and me.

Not a glass of water,
or even a gallon jug,
or a keg--
but a geyser,
a torrent,
overflowing banks,
creeks and rivulets
turned to rushing rivers,
and the place where that abundance
of life giving,
sustaining water comes from
is our believing selves,
our broken,
loving hearts.

We are to be fountains of living water—
we are to be fountains of living water
not to slake our own thirst—but that of others.

But,
do we dare believe it?
do we dare risk it?
do we dare pour out the water of our lives?

A short anecdote raises the same question:

There was a woman who got lost in the desert.
After wandering around for a long time
her throat became very dry.
Then she saw a little shack in the distance.
She made her way over to the shack
and found a water pump
with a small jug of water and a note.
The note read:
“pour all the water into the top of the pump to prime it,
if you do this you will get all the water you need”.

Now the woman wasn't sure about this.
She had never heard of such a thing.
So, she had a choice to make.
If she trusted the note and poured the water in and it worked,
she would have the water she needed.
If it didn't work,
she would still be thirsty and she even might die.

Or, she could choose to drink the water in the jug
and get immediate satisfaction,
but it might not be enough and she could still die.

So, what do you think she did?
What would you do?
What will we do?

We know what Mother Marie did.
We know what our six pioneer sister did.
We know what our foremothers did.
We know what our Jubilarians did and are still doing.

They took the risk.
They took the risk
and poured out the water of their lives.
They were generous toward each day.
They poured out the gift of themselves as living water
gallon by gallon,
quart by quart,
cup by cup,
and sometimes,
teaspoon by teaspoon.

Well,
the woman of the story—
also took the risk
and poured the entire jug into the pump
and began to work the handle.
At first nothing happened
and she got a little scared
but she kept going and water started coming out.
So much water came out
she drank all she wanted,
took a shower,
and filled all the containers she could find.
Because she was willing to trust,
because she was willing to believe,
because she was willing to risk,
she got all the water she needed.

Now the note also said: "after you have finished,
please refill the jug for the next traveler."
The woman refilled the jug and added to the note:
"Please prime the pump, trust me it works!"

This is the same assurance our Jubilee women give us:
They have refilled the jugs for us
time and time again.
They are witnesses to the truth
that if we pour out the water of our lives,
there will be enough
even more than enough.

However,
it is no longer sufficient for us to trust and believe
that we are enough
that we have enough.

The living water that flows within us
is not to slack our own thirsts.
Living water
always looks for a way out.
Living water
is driven to pour itself out.

Our commitment to Jubilee means
that we will continue to pour ourselves out as living water.

We pour out the water of our lives
when we widen our circles and embrace and cherish
our intercultural and international ties;
We pour out the water of our lives
as we strive for right relationships with all;
We pour out the water of our lives,
as we live and promote non-violence;

We pour out the water of our lives,
as we risk being marginalized;
We pour out the water of our lives,
as we share, even in the midst of scarcity--

Now, more than ever
we can be generous toward each day.
Every day, we have less reason
for not pouring ourselves out
Every day we have less reason
for not giving ourselves away.
(To paraphrase Wendell Berry)

Story adapted from: (<http://www.citychapelonline.com/city-devotionals/april-2013/#sthash.QI8C0qPN.dpuf>)

Given by Sister Michele Bisbey