

23 March

It's a bit hard listening to these readings about water, abundant and life-giving water that nourishes the earth and satisfies our thirst, when parts of Queensland and New South Wales continue to face a severe and crippling drought. City people take these things for granted. We turn on the tap and water flows in abundance. Sometimes we waste that abundance. Occasionally on Sunday afternoons between appointments, I watch the ABC program *Landline* and see the desperate situation people experience in rural and regional Australia.

We had our own experience of this a few years ago during water restrictions. People were asked to consume water wisely and not be so wasteful when it came to watering gardens, washing cars and normal household use. I am happy to confess publicly that in the past I have run the washing machine for a shirt and a pair of socks. But during the water restrictions, we all came to value a precious and limited resource. Even the fountains of St Patrick's Cathedral were turned off and all those scripture quotes about water flowing in abundance and Jesus being the 'water of life' made no sense whatsoever when the fountains became dry, dirty and dusty.

It is in that context that today's readings make sense. The people of the Old Testament are tired and tormented by thirst. They complain against Moses and doubt everything that God had said and promised. But what does God do? Does he punish the people? No, he says to Moses to strike the rock. Notice the irony; we normally don't get water from a rock but here the rock becomes a sign of God's life-giving love for his people. They are so tired, so frustrated, so annoyed, so grumbling on this journey that Moses is beside himself. And in the midst of this spiritual and physical thirst, God gives life to his people, he gives them water flowing in abundance, he gives them hope for the journey ahead and takes away their desire to go back to Egypt, to the place of darkness and slavery. God sets his people free.

In today's Gospel, Jesus encounters the Samaritan woman and he asks her for a drink. Jews and Samaritans normally did not associate and this Gospel touches something in the woman's desire to encounter Jesus. She comes to faith in the encounter with Jesus, she wants him to give

her some of that life-giving water, that water of eternal life so that she will never be thirsty again. Like the people of the Old Testament, she too is on a journey of faith and like all these biblical characters, we too on our journey of life and faith sometimes get thirsty, we sometimes lose heart, grow despondent, we doubt the power of God's word and wish to go back to the past of slavery and sin.

These readings that speak of water are very powerful in an Australian context when there is a severe drought. But on this journey of Lent, these readings are also pointing us towards the baptismal water of Easter, the new life that flows in abundance, our encounter with the risen Jesus who gives us the water of faith that will never make us thirsty again. The new water of Easter baptism renews and strengthens our faith, it purifies us and washes us clean, it reminds of that life-giving relationship between God and his people. Baptismal water is given to us in love just as God gave water to the chosen people of the Old Testament when they wandered around confused, tired and thirsty.

As we long for this baptismal water of faith, let us pray again for those parts of the country suffering drought and the communities of our nation desperate for the abundance of life-giving water. Let us journey on in faith to Easter, to meet the risen Lord, and the abundance of water he gives so that we may never thirst again.