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The Third Sunday of Lent (A)

Few things are more satisfying on a hot and sunny summer afternoon than a nice, cold glass of water. Perhaps this is why the Lord offers us that water that "will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14).

In much the same way that water satisfies our physical thirst, Jesus wishes to satisfy our spiritual thirst. What is this spiritual thirst?

It is that desire, that great and insuppressible longing, for meaning and purpose in life, for peace, for fulfillment and satisfaction, for joy. In short, it is the thirst for God himself present in each of us whether we recognize it or not.

The first reading contains a powerful foreshadowing of the way in which the Lord will satisfy the thirst of his people. This is not the first time that the people "grumbled against Moses" (Exodus 17:3). In the previous chapter they grumbled because they were hungry and so the Lord fed them with manna from heaven. Today they grumble because they are thirsty and so the Lord gives them water from the rock. Just as the Lord satisfies their physical hunger and thirst, so will he satisfy our spiritual hunger and thirst.

Let us take a closer look at that rock. The Lord said to Moses, "Strike the rock, and the water will flow from it for the people to drink" (Exodus 17:6). Clearly this was no ordinary rock!

The rabbis tell us that not only did that rock give water to drink, but it followed the Israelites as well! What, then, is this rock? Saint Paul has the answer.

He says, "All ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from a spiritual rock, and that rock was Christ" (I Corinthians 10:4). When Moses struck the rock he struck Christ, a great foreshadowing of what was to come.

As Jesus hung dead on the cross, "one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water" (John 19:34). As we look upon him whom they have pierced, Jesus looks down lovingly on us and says, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as Scripture says, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers or living water'" (John 7:38).

We see this beautifully depicted in the window above that of Saint Clare. From the heart of the cross flow seven streams, each flowing into a fountain. These waters are the Seven Sacraments that receive their grace and power from the heart of the pierced Savior and the fountain is the Church.

Through the Eucharist Jesus satisfies our spiritual hunger by giving us very own Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, to nourish us and sustain us on our pilgrim journey. Answering our plea, "Stay with us" (Luke 24:29), Jesus fulfills his promise: "I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

If the Lord is to dwell in our midst it is fitting for us to give him a proper house, both to honor his presence and to safeguard his Body and Blood from any profanation. No doubt you noticed that the tabernacle is different today than only a few days ago.

The former tabernacle - noble and beautiful as it was - could easily have been broken into because it was not very secure. The tabernacle has been changed out of growing concern for the safekeeping and protection of our Eucharistic Lord. The current tabernacle is far more secure than the last.

Monsignor Enlow and I discussed the matter and thought about placing this more cylindrical tabernacle where it is. We called two carpenters in the parish to look at the old tabernacle and asked their thoughts. They thought our plans were good and could easily be done, and by the end of the day the new tabernacle was in place.

If you recall, the former tabernacle very much resembled the church with its four pillars and sloping roof. This will

return soon in the form of a canopy over this tabernacle as soon as it is resized to fit properly.

I know that when the doors in the front of the tabernacle were put in some years ago they were a cause of no small debate. I am happy to say that these doors will never close again. Let me explain why.

It was said a few years ago that the focus of the Liturgy is the altar and that the tabernacle should not be located in the sanctuary because it is a distraction and that churches in Europe did not have the tabernacle in the sanctuary. This thought was never part of official teaching and you will not find it in any authoritative theological or liturgical document. These were the thoughts of a few people that were somehow forced through in several places, but never the mind of the Universal Church.

It is true that the altar is the primary focus of the Liturgy but it is not true that the tabernacle is a distraction. The Blessed Eucharist is reserved in the tabernacle for your personal prayer and adoration and I invite you to stop in the church periodically to visit with the Lord. It is also true that Cathedrals in Europe often do not have the tabernacle in the sanctuary. Instead they have the Bishop's chair, the Cathedra, in the sanctuary. However, in the parish churches, the tabernacle is very often in the sanctuary.

The doors that were installed here found a clever loophole to meet Diocesan policy at the time without removing the tabernacle. I heartily commend whoever thought up those doors. But now, as Diocesan policy has come in line with the liturgical thought of the whole Church, the doors are no longer needed.

Consider it this way: Jesus is present in the tabernacle, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. Is he less present because a screen is placed in front of the tabernacle? Of course not! Theologically and liturgically there is no reason for the doors and so they will now remain open.

Let us now return to this living water given to us through the sacramental life of the Church. Are you at peace? Is your soul at rest? If not, it is because your sin has separated you from Jesus Christ, from him who is our peace. During this season of grace, why not approach the Lord in the Sacrament of Penance and drink freely of the living waters offered you there? Come to the Lord and be satisfied. Come to the Lord and know peace. Come, and drink from the waters of salvation! Amen!