

# THE DAY OF PENTECOST

June 11 & 12, 2011

“If Anyone Is Thirsty”

John 7: 37-39

The events recorded in the seventh chapter of the Gospel according to John, from which today's Gospel lesson is taken, all took place during what is called the Jewish “Festival of Tabernacles.” This festival celebrated the time the Jews spent in tents and tabernacles during their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. It was one of three great Jewish festivals that every adult within fifteen miles of Jerusalem was required to attend every year. It was celebrated in the middle of October.

During this festival the faithful gathered to thank God for the rain and for the fruit of the earth that sustained them not only in the wilderness but also in the Promised Land. And one of the rituals that was performed each day of the festival occurred when one of the priests filled a golden pitcher with water at the Pool of Siloam and then, with pitcher in hand, he led a procession through what was called the “Water Gate” into the city while the words of Isaiah 12:3 were spoken – “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.” The water in the golden pitcher was then brought into the Temple and poured out on the altar as an offering to God. While this was done, the “Hallel” – better known to us as Psalms 113-118 – was sung by the temple choir and the worshippers all shouted and waved palms. In this way they gave thanks to God for watering the earth especially in preparation for the fall harvest and they remembered the water that sprang from the rock in the wilderness and all the water that sustained them in their journey to the Promised Land.

It was with this in mind that Jesus stood up in the Temple and spoke the words recorded in today's lesson – “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, streams of living water will flow from within him.”

Today, the faithful have gathered all over the earth to celebrate the Festival of Pentecost, one of the three great festivals of the Christian Church. It's a festival in which we give thanks to God for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon us as we travel through the wilderness of this life on our way to another Promised Land – heaven.

It's no coincidence that Jesus associated the coming of the Holy Spirit with the water that's mentioned in our Gospel lesson for today. Water was crucial in the unfolding story of salvation throughout the Old Testament – especially the water of the Red Sea through which the Israelites passed on their way out of bondage in Egypt as well as the water of the Jordan River through which they passed on their way into the Promised Land. And water was important in the story of salvation in the New Testament too – especially the water with which John the Baptizer baptized many in preparation for the coming of the Messiah, the Savior, as well as the water that was and continues to be used to receive one and all into the Kingdom of God through Holy Baptism even

today. Because water was so scarce in the desert world of ancient Israel, it was of great value – especially valuable were those streams that flowed steadily during the dry season – streams of living water, they were called – and, in that, water was not only a symbol of the physical blessings that came from God but, even more importantly, the spiritual blessings that came from God as well.

“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink,” Jesus said. Of course, in point of fact, everyone is thirsty – whether they realize it or not – thirsty for life and love and happiness – thirsty for a right relationship with God – thirsty for meaning and purpose and direction in life. You see, everyone is born thirsty by virtue of the sin we have all inherited from those who have gone before us and we live thirsty by virtue of the sin each and every one of us commits in thought, word and deed every day.

Many try to quench their thirst in what they do or don't do, all by themselves. But, in the end, they are never really able to quench their thirst because their souls are dry and barren. Only as God comes to people in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ can that thirst be quenched -- for he and he alone offers that which can truly quench our thirst – the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. And so, in love, Jesus invites all who are thirsty to come to him, to believe in him, to trust in him, to follow him, and to drink deeply of him and live.

And for those who come and drink and live, they become channels through which this living water flows to others as well. And that, if you will, is exactly what happened when the Holy Spirit was poured out on those first disciples on Pentecost. Through the power of that Holy Spirit they became channels through which living water flowed into the hearts and lives of others who were thirsty as well. In fact, it flowed so freely that first Pentecost that the Bible tells us that over 3,000 people quenched their thirst as they came to faith in Jesus Christ and were baptized that day.

We are here because we too have been drawn to faith in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit and, in Christ, our thirst is quenched. But we're also here because the Holy Spirit seeks to enable and empower us more and more to be effective channels through which this living water may flow to others through us in our own day and age as well.

God stands ready again in Word and Sacrament to pour out the Holy Spirit on us all to quench our thirst today and to be the channels whereby others may quench their thirst this coming week as well. May God grant this to us all for Jesus' sake. Amen.