

**Thursday, Oct. 15**  
**Feast of St. Teresa of Avila**

*Wisdom 7:7-14*

*Psalm 118*

*Romans 8:14-17,26-27*

*John 4:5-15*

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¡Feliz fiesta de Santa Teresa d'Avila!

On this day, we celebrate a great saint among us, one who has inspired the Church and called us to a deeply personal and intimate friendship with God. Teresa is also one of the patron saints of the IHM Sisters. In our *IHM Constitutions*, which is our Rule of Life, we proclaim:

“The life of prayer taught by Jesus is our inheritance from Saint Alphonsus Liguori, who also gave us, as a model, Saint Teresa of Avila, a woman of contemplation and action.” (*IHM Constitutions* 6.6)

In this Eucharistic liturgy, Teresa draws close to us as together we listen to the word of God.

It's the middle of a scorching hot day. Normally when women (always the women) went to draw water from the well, they go early before the heat of the day becomes unbearable. But one woman chooses to go at the hottest part of the day, likely because she could be alone and not bullied by the others who did not approve of her five different marriages or her current relationship. The social and religious pressure and the shame were heavier and more oppressive than the jug of water that she had to carry along the hot, dusty road from the well back home.

I like to imagine that the woman enjoyed her solace at the well every day. A chance to “get away from it all.” A chance to commune with nature and be about the simplicity of sun, earth and water.

What a surprise then to see a person – in fact a man, and a Jewish man at that (for she was from Samaria and neither Jews nor Samaritans much preferred each other) – at the well. He is tired, also beat down by the midday sun. He asks for water, which means using the same cup, the same bucket as the woman. Who *is* this guy?

But our woman is tough, and smart, not one to be scared or put off by this strange encounter – not unlike Teresa, I might add. She straightens her spine, rising to her full height and dignity and challenges the stranger. “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?”

Jesus respects this and enters into a deep conversation with the woman. He meets her eye to eye, heart to heart. He tells her that if only she knew him, she would ask him for water. For Jesus knew that she too was arriving at the well not just bone tired, but soul tired. She was searching, searching, searching for something. Her heart was restless.

“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink’, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” (John 4:10)

Taken aback, but intrigued, the woman says: “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?” (John 4:11)

She’s just on the edge of understanding. And Jesus meets her desire, inviting her to a radically new way of drawing from the well. He tells her that he gives living water that will truly satisfy. This must have been amazing for her to hear, an answered prayer.

“Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.” (John 4:15)

Give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty.

These words of the woman at the well, are our words too, and they were words that Teresa herself prayed often, for this is one of her fondest Gospel passages. (*Life* 30.24)<sup>1</sup>

Teresa knew well what it meant to thirst, both in her own life and as a spiritual guide to many. She writes of one of her sisters, something I think many of us can related to:

She feels a strange loneliness, finding no companionship in any earthly creature; nor could she, I believe, among those who dwell in heaven, since they are not her Beloved: meanwhile all society is a torture to her. She is like one suspended in mid-air, who can neither touch the earth nor mount to heaven; she is unable to reach the water while parched with thirst and this is not a thirst that can be borne, but one which nothing will quench ... (*Interior Castle*, 6.11.5)

Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty.

“In this life,” Teresa writes, “the soul will never thirst for anything more.” (*Way of Perfection*, 19)

Jesus challenges the woman and each one of us to search not for just any water – not for temporary satisfaction to our greatest longings in life – but to search for living water. Teresa writes that at first in this search, we may indeed go to the well, lower our bucket, hear it clanging against dry walls until it hits water, we hope!

Over time, with a faithfulness to love – love of God and love of neighbor, contemplation and action, Mary and Martha – Teresa says that we grow in opening ourselves to this

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, it is said that Teresa kept a picture of Jesus and the woman at the well in her room; cf. Francisco de Ribera: *Vida de Santa Teresa de Jesús*. Nueva ed. aumentada, con introducción, etc., por el P. Jaime Pons (Barcelona, 1908) lib. i. ch. iv.

living water not just from the well but from all around us in a sacred universe that is saturated with the love of God.<sup>2</sup>

Yet when your bucket is dry – it happens to all of us, even Teresa – or your thirst is never slaked, go to the Christ, and with the courage of the woman at the well, say: Sir, give me this water.

And then open yourself. We cannot receive anything if we are closed. A covered bucket cannot draw water from a well.

Open yourself.

Open yourself to your own hopes, longings, and yes, even your fears and anxieties.

Open yourself.

Open yourself to your life and the world around you.

Yes, it is not easy.

Yes, it can even hurt.

Still we are called to open ourselves to the living water that Jesus the Christ promises will fill us.

Teresa assures us that Jesus will not fail us. She writes, “without understanding how, we find in ourselves spiritual improvement, so great that we are afterward left amazed.” (*Foundations* 5.6)

Dear sisters and friends, let us be open to being left amazed, just like the woman at the well.

Through the intercession of Teresa, we pray this for ourselves and for the world.

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<sup>2</sup> See Teresa’s teaching on the “Four Waters” in *Way of Perfection*