

Today I'm going to preach about this "living water" Jesus wants to give to the Samaritan woman. What's He talking about? I want to begin with the idea of being a mystic. That word "mystic" may bring images to mind of Yoda or Obe-Wan Kenobi, or some kind of woo-woo Californian cult. But mysticism is at the heart of what Jesus wants for us. We are all called to be saints – but that also means we are called to be mystics.

Living the Catholic life has an order and a goal. It starts by entering into a saving relationship with Jesus. That means we are baptized, which puts us into what we call a "state of grace." Grace is simply the inner life of God He wants to share with every one of us. Being in a state of grace, or returning to it if we've fallen into grave sin, is the first order of business in the spiritual life. For instance, in the Gospel today Jesus brings up the Samaritan Woman's rather chaotic sexual and married life. It will all need to be dealt with so she can enjoy the living water Jesus offers her. We have the same struggles with various sins in our lives.

But once we're in a state of grace there are two projects that need to go on simultaneously in our spiritual lives. The first is growing in the virtues. You're probably not surprised by this. In fact, sometimes I think that is almost the only thing some people associate with the faith – trying to become more virtuous human beings. But it is important. Humility, charity, patience, courage, gentleness, chastity -- all of these virtues need to grow in us if God is to grow in us. Grace and sin can't co-exist. We need to remove sin from our lives so there is room and a place for Christ. And this is a struggle.

But at the same time as we're working on growing the virtues in our lives we must also engage in mental, meditative prayer. By this I mean we spend time with Jesus, thinking about Him, talking to Him, sitting with Him. I'm not just talking about grace before meals or asking God for things. That's why I insist on those 20 minutes of prayer each day. We don't grow much beyond the mere state of grace without that prayer time. There are many different types of mental prayer. But the

key to all of them is that in some way we raise our hearts and minds to God – we engage. Words without thoughts don't count.

Working on the virtues and mental prayer are mutually reinforcing. This is a great truth of the Christian life. The best way to experience fruitful prayer is to live a more generous and virtuous life. And the best way to grow in those virtues that seem so difficult to master by oneself is to engage faithfully in mental prayer. This mutual reinforcement points to the truth underlying the spiritual life – it is all about trying to let God move and act in our souls by moving out all that isn't God in them. And this God of ours is not an impersonal force, but a personal God who loves us.

St. Teresa of Avila uses the analogy of water to explain what the soul is doing during this period in one's spiritual life. She says that growing the virtues and engaging in mental prayer are things we do (of course, with God's grace and cooperation). But we're doing most of the work. It's like going to a well and having to crank up that bucket from

the bottom of a deep well. Think here of the Samaritan Woman at the well – and how tired she is of doing this. These parts of the spiritual life are like the hard work of drawing water in the noon day heat.

But in the next step of the spiritual life we're passive – Jesus works on us without our activity. At some point – and it may be after years, even many years, of growth in virtue and prayer – Jesus begins to pour into us His own life, grace. This has been called “infused contemplation” by theologians. That means “poured in contemplation.” Jesus pours His life into us as we just rest in His presence. This is Christian mysticism. This is the living water Jesus promises the Samaritan Woman, and us, at the well. “The water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

In fact, St. Teresa uses the same image. Infused contemplation, she says, feels like just sitting at the source of a spring and letting the water rise up in oneself without having to move or go to the well to crank and work at it. At this stage something is happening in your

prayer time that isn't coming from you. It being done to you. And there's no need or desire to move. You don't want it to stop. A spring of living water is welling up in you that refreshes.

This is the goal towards which our spiritual lives are pointed. This mystical, infused contemplation will just continue to grow and deepen if we're generous with God in prayer and life. It will lead from this Prayer of Quiet, through more ecstatic experiences. For all of us members of the Body of Christ mystical prayer should be an expected outcome. It is this infused contemplation that gives us heroic virtue and makes saints. Grace being poured into us by God is what allows saints to do the extraordinary things they do. They can't do those marvelous things by themselves any more than we can.

Therefore, working on those twin spiritual practices of growing the virtues and mental prayer daily are the main point of human lives. We may have other good things going on – children, parents, spouses,

careers – but if Jesus isn't before all else in our lives this prayer won't happen to us. And that is the ultimate tragedy.

It's no wonder that the Samaritan Woman leaves her water jar behind. She doesn't need it after discovering who Jesus really is and generously becoming His missionary to her own town. There is a better water she has begun to experience. She has changed and is no longer her former self. Do you expect to become a mystic? Do you believe it's possible and that Jesus created you for it? It's true. We're all at Jacob's Well at high noon. Jesus is saying to each of us, "If you knew the gift of God . . . you would have asked [me] and [I] would have given you living water." How do we respond?