

In the name of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

The guiding idea behind this homily belongs to Alyce McKenzie at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. Picture for me a bucket. Perhaps it's the bucket you use for wash water when you scrub your floors. Or a bucket you use when you work in your garden, for carrying water or fertilizer or weeds and clippings. I'm picturing the one that sits in my laundry room – it's blue, made of plastic and has a handle that sometimes lets go. A bucket is a mighty practical and useful object though ever so humble and ordinary. If we didn't have buckets, there is some certainly some work that we would not be able to do, or at least, not easily. And if you were standing by a deep well, you would need a bucket if you hoped to get water out of that well. In the gospel reading for this morning, Jesus meets a woman at a well. She knows the value of a bucket. When Jesus offers her living water, she replies, "**Sir, you have no bucket and the well is deep.**" And looking at things at the level of appearances, she is right. She's basically saying, "*The task before you is impossible because you don't have the tools or the means to accomplish it.*"

Don't we sometimes hear her voice or one like it when we are faced with one of life's difficulties; when we are standing, so to speak by a deep well with no bucket? It's the voice we hear when the problem seems bigger than the human means we have to face it and solve it. Maybe it's a new job or responsibility, an illness of mind, body or spirit, an addiction, an unfulfilling relationship or no relationship at all. Maybe it's a past wound or fear about the future. Maybe it's grief or guilt or sadness. Maybe this feeling comes to us when we watch people in our communities suffering – the abused children, the homeless on our streets, or those millions beyond our borders that have no country to call their own. It may be any number of things that take us to that moment where the task seems insurmountable and we don't feel we have the tools or the means to accomplish it. How often the well is deep and we have no bucket!

"**Sir, you have no bucket and the well is deep,**" says the woman at the well, to Jesus; the one who, if she only knew it, could quench her deepest thirsts. Like many encounters in John's gospel, this woman's encounter with Jesus has the potential to change her life. But only if she looks past that basic level of appearances and goes deeper with Jesus – leaving the literal level of buckets and wells

and moving on to the realm of the spirit. And this woman does that. A bit about her background before we go any further. This woman is entangled in a situation that seems to have her trapped. In her relationship with Jesus, a respectable male Jew, she has several strikes against her, at least on the surface. She is a woman and a Samaritan, both reasons he should not speak with her, according to custom. And she has a sketchy relationship history. Her past personal relationships have made her an outsider in relation to her community. This is clear from the fact that she comes to the well for water – her life and sustenance – in the heat of the day and not in the cool early morning when everyone else comes. She is clearly not a member of the village with whom respectable members would speak. She has lost her dignity and her place in community and her social situation is beyond her power to resolve. That well is indeed deep and she has no bucket.

Still Jesus speaks to her. He gives her the one thing that no one else will – the gift of relationship. He offers her a relationship with God through him. It is this relationship that will restore her dignity and give her a greater community than the one in her village. He offers her living water; spiritual sustenance for which she does not need a bucket. He says of those who receive this living water: **“The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”** For the woman at the well, a source of grace and strength opened up within her when she entered into that relationship with Jesus and through Jesus, with God. She had broken through a barrier, no longer looking at Jesus in a literal way; in the realm of appearances – but going deeper to find a life-giving and life-sustaining source. And she is changed. She goes to her neighbours, those who had shunned her – she goes in love and caring for them – to share what she has discovered. She goes hardly daring to believe it, as we see from her proclamation to them: **“Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done. He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”** In those words we see the newness of her faith – the questioning and the daring of it, the beginning of the growing into mature faith that would come in stages over time, but the unavoidable compulsion to share right away what she has experienced and has only just begun to comprehend.

This woman’s story is our story. Living water is available to us too, any time we stand next to a deep well with no bucket. Jesus sits by every deep well in our lives, in the heat of every day and at our most tired and vulnerable moments. He’s there for every

monumental task and every seemingly hopeless situation. When we think that the well is deep and we have no bucket, we are looking at appearances only. We need to go to a deeper level with Jesus. In reality, our bucket, our sustenance, our life giving water is not far off and unreachable – it is a close resource, within us, welling up, bubbling up, springing forth, it is an ever flowing fountain watering our spirits. It is Jesus' presence and leads to eternal life which begins now and will never be exhausted. The Samaritan woman's prayer is our prayer. **"Sir, give me this water"** It is a prayer that Jesus is answering even when we don't have the strength to pray it. Let me leave you with a poem. I do not know anything about the author beyond his name – Antonio Machado and his life span – 1875-1939. But I can relate to the wonder he expresses at this life-giving gift of God.

Water of a new life

**Last night as I was sleeping
I dreamt—marvelous error!—
that a spring was breaking
out in my heart.
I said: Along which secret aqueduct,
Oh water, are you coming to me,
water of a new life
that I have never drunk?**

**Last night as I was sleeping,
I dreamt—marvelous error!—
that I had a beehive
here inside my heart.
And the golden bees
were making white combs
and sweet honey
from my old failures.**

**Last night as I was sleeping,
I dreamt—marvelous error!—
that a fiery sun was giving
light inside my heart.
It was fiery because I felt
warmth as from a hearth,
and sun because it gave light
and brought tears to my eyes.**

**Last night as I slept, I dreamt—marvelous error!—
that it was God I had here inside my heart.**

Thanks and praise be to God. Amen