

3 Lent A 2008
St. Mary, Siloam Springs, AR

Scott Hahn gives a very startling example of what happens when someone tries to fill their lives with something else besides God. During World War II, German u-boats attacked and sank countless American warships. Many American sailors survived the torpedo attacks, but found themselves stranded in the middle of the ocean in life rafts for days. When their water supply ran out, some men became desperate and even a little deranged. In their extreme thirst, some actually tried to drink the sea water which was full of salt. Briefly their thirst was quenched. But every quickly the salt in the water began to absorb the moisture inside their bodies, creating a kind of fire inside them. Those men soon died from extreme dehydration. The water that looked like it might quench their thirst actually created a much more intense thirst that it could not satisfy, and which consumed the drinker. You know, I've been to Mexico and have accidentally drunk the water, and suffered "Montezuma's Revenge." But what Hahn describes is not a temporary digestion problem but actual death. His point is that when we try to fill our hearts with other things besides God, things like money, possessions, prestige, power, sex, food, alcohol and so forth, it's like drinking sea water. It may quench our thirst temporarily, but eventually it will consume us and destroy us.

Today's gospel is one of the most moving and eloquent chapters in the entire Bible, and so, even though it's long, I

read it in its entirety. It's about a thirsty woman, who discovers that only Jesus can truly quench her thirst. If you paid very close attention, you noticed that their conversation covers two different kinds of thirst. Jesus offers her a special kind of water – He's really talking about His love – that would be like a spring welling up inside her. And she says: "Great! I won't have to come to this darn well to draw water." But you see, she has missed His real point. So Jesus asks her to call her husband. And she replies, no doubt very embarrassed, that she doesn't have a husband. Jesus tells her that she's actually had 5 husbands. Now, Jesus is not trying to hurt this woman's feelings or expose her promiscuity. Instead, He wants her to see that she is thirsty, thirsty for love, and she's been drinking sea water trying to satisfy that need, and it won't work. Do you remember that old song, "Looking for love in all the wrong places; looking for love in too many faces..." Well, that's what this woman has been doing. But now she has found fresh water, the water only Jesus can give, that water which is Christ's love and which alone truly satisfies our need.

For Christmas this past year, a friend gave me the movie called "The Winds of War," based on the novel by Herman Wouk. It's about an American family that gets caught up in the chaos of World War II. You know, this was the first time I have seen Adolph Hitler portrayed in a movie, and let me tell you, it was scary. There's no doubt that he was a charismatic leader, a very stirring speaker, a man on a mission to make his country great. But if you look more

closely you see a man who was extremely thirsty, thirsty for power, and he was drinking sea water to satisfy that thirst. Do you remember what he did – heck, some of you were probably there! First, he wanted Czechoslovakia, then Poland, then he invaded Norway, and marched into Belgium and France, and so on. Yes, World War II was a complicated time in the history of the world, but after you peel back all the people and all the places, you find one man who was deeply thirsty. And instead of seeking to satisfy that thirst in God’s love, he chose sea water, and he destroyed himself and a lot of other people in the process.

My friends, the 40 days of Lent is the time to admit honestly that we, too, are thirsty people, and we often drink sea water rather than the water that Jesus offers us. Catholics have the tradition during Lent of giving up something, like chocolate or T.V. or curse words. And that’s good. But do you know **why** we give these things up? That sacrifice is telling Jesus I’ve been filling my heart with this sea water, Lord, instead of You, and I want to stop. Like the Samaritan woman, we want to say, “Give me Your water; fill me with Your love.” And so what is your Lenten sacrifice? Maybe you need to reconsider it; let me help you. If you are a workaholic, during Lent leave the office at 5 p.m. sharp every day. If you drink too much alcohol, give up the booze. If you’re addicted to pornography on the internet, put your computer in a public place in the house...and stop looking at the porn, too! If you’re vain and worried about your looks – something that I don’t have to worry about – do like St.

Philip Neri, who grew a beard and then shaved only half his face. If you're addicted to food, eat only Lean Cuisine during Lent. You get the point. Now, please don't miss understand me: I'm not saying that work or alcohol or good looks are bad; they're not. The problem is when they dominate our lives, and we think more about them than we think about God.

Folks, we're all thirsty, like those men in the life rafts in the middle of the ocean. The only question is what will we drink to quench that thirst: sea water, or the water that Jesus gives, which becomes like a spring inside us welling up to eternal life?

Praised be Jesus Christ!