

### **Third Sunday of Lent - Lectionary: 28**

#### **Reading I - [Exodus 17:3-7](#)**

In those days, in their thirst for water, the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "Why did you ever make us leave Egypt? Was it just to have us die here of thirst with our children and our livestock?" So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? a little more and they will stone me!" The LORD answered Moses, "Go over there in front of the people, along with some of the elders of Israel, holding in your hand, as you go, the staff with which you struck the river. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock in Horeb. Strike the rock, and the water will flow from it for the people to drink." This Moses did, in the presence of the elders of Israel. The place was called Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled there and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD in our midst or not?"

**Responsorial Psalm - [Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9](#) R. (8) If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.**

#### **Reading II - [Romans 5:1-2, 5-8](#)**

Brothers and sisters: Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God. And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. For Christ, while we were still helpless, died at the appointed time for the ungodly. Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person, though perhaps for a good person one might even find courage to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

#### **Gospel - [John 4:5-15, 19b-26, 39a, 40-42](#)**

Jesus came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there. Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down there at the well. It was about noon.

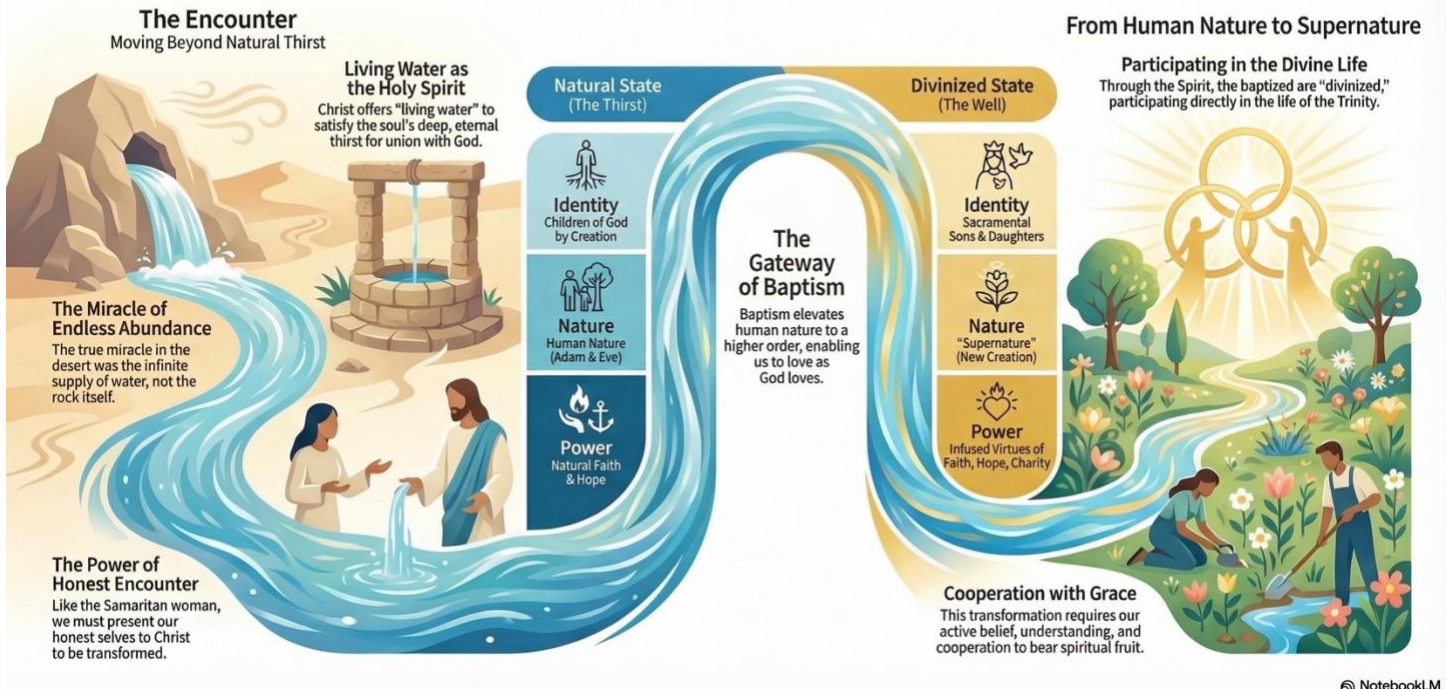
A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?"—For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.—Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink, 'you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep; where then can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this cistern and drank from it himself with his children and his flocks?" Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.

"I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain; but you people say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You people worship what you do not understand; we worship what we understand, because salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Christ; when he comes, he will tell us everything." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking with you."

Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him. When the Samaritans came to him, they invited him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. Many more began to believe in him because of his word, and they said to the woman, "We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world."

“If you knew the gift of God.”

# Living Water: From Human Thirst to Divine Life



## Summary

The following homily synthesizes theological reflections and scriptural analyses for the Third Sunday of Lent, drawing from the Book of Exodus, the Letter to the Romans, and the Gospel of John. The central theme is the transition from physical thirst to spiritual fulfillment through "Living Water," identified as the Holy Spirit.

Key takeaways include:

- **The Nature of Biblical Miracles:** The miracle in the desert (Exodus) was not the appearance of water itself, but the supernatural abundance provided to a multitude.
- **The Gift of Baptism:** Baptism is presented as an ontological transformation that elevates human nature to a "supernature," allowing participation in the divine life of the Trinity.
- **Radical Conversion (Metanoia):** The encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman serves as the primary model for spiritual transformation, shifting from social isolation and sin to missionary zeal and certainty of faith.
- **The Role of the Holy Spirit:** The Spirit is the agent through whom God's love is "poured into our hearts," providing the foundation for the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity.

## Conclusion: The Vocation of Humanity

The overarching purpose of these scriptural themes is to illustrate the ultimate vocation of humanity: to be drawn into intimate communion with the Trinity. This process, which begins at Baptism, is a "moral and ontological ascent" toward the beatific vision—full communion with God after death. The Lenten season serves as a period of preparation, encouraging believers to listen to the "Beloved Son" and allow the Holy Spirit to radically transform their lives from a state of natural thirst to one of supernatural fulfillment.

## Homily

Highlighted in the readings for this 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent, is the Holy Spirit as the "living water" of God's love poured into us that quenches the deep spiritual thirst we have for God. They provide us with a good opportunity to reflect on our reception of this gift of God, and of our experience of the Holy Spirit. *"When I prove my holiness among you, I will gather you from all the foreign lands; and I will pour clean water upon you and cleanse you from all your impurities."*<sup>1</sup> A prophetic promise of spiritual and physical restoration for Israel. It foretells God gathering and forming a holy nation from foreign nations, cleansing them from idolatry and impurity, and replacing their hardened hearts with a *"heart of flesh"*. The readings collectively call for a deeper, Spirit-led conversion, encouraging believers to seek the *"fountain of water, springing up to everlasting life"*. The living waters poured out for us. This is the great miracle. The Holy Spirit poured out that pours the love of God into us. If you had this living water, if you knew the gift of God, you would never thirst. We, unlike those Israelites, have this gift through our baptism. And today's readings ought to recall our baptism. Whether it was as an infant or whether it was as an adult.

Fun fact, the miracle in the first reading, not what you think. You might think any water coming from a rock is itself a miracle, isn't that how most of us think of this reading, and a similar one from the Book of Numbers. But in this case, that's not the miracle. The fun fact is that there were porous rocks all through the Sinai of a kind that gathered water inside. And because of the heat and the nature of the desert, these rocks developed a crust over them. So, when Moses strikes the rock, as was common among shepherds, the water that was contained within came out. Very natural, normal thing to happen.

So, what's the miracle? Moses advocates before God, what am I going to do with these people? And God mercifully provides. God is doing something, even though the people were angry and thirsty and caused Moses to fear for his life. The miracle is, the amount of water provided. We know how many people are involved. It's not 10 or 20. And, no rock is big enough to have enough water held within to meet the needs of all these thirsty people in the desert. But the water keeps coming. It's like the multiplication of the loaves. It's like the multiplication of the mana, more than enough is always provided. It's the amount of water, the endless supply. And that endless supply of water satisfying the physical thirst is understood to be, both in the Old Testament looking all the way back and foreshadowing into the New Testament, the gift of God which is the Holy Spirit.

In today's First Reading<sup>2</sup> the Israelites, who do not possess the Holy Spirit, are thirsty and fed up. At every experience of discomfort and difficulty, and so easily stirred to rebellion by those among them who would sow seeds of doubt, they complain and rebel. This is not so unlike Christians, which indicates too many of us are not living immersed in God's love, intimately familiar with the Holy Spirit, or availing ourselves of the gifts of the Holy Spirit received in Baptism / Confirmation. The Holy Spirit ought to be for us the divine force that turns our human desperation and "thirst" (sin/struggle) into trust and spiritual renewal. This all-too-common experience of Christians also indicates that our spiritual and moral lives are not rooted in the infused virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity – but are rather reliant upon natural faith, hope, and charity. As is usual, the Israelites focus their discontent at Moses, who is afraid they'll kill him and cries out to God. God, in response, mercifully provides an abundance of water for everyone from the porous rock common to the region.<sup>3</sup> For our part we too blame others or worse, God directly, for our failure to remain in Him, to listen to the beloved Son and to do what he says.

Emphasizing the Holy Spirit as the agent of God's love, In the second reading, Saint Paul explicitly states that the theological virtue of Hope, *"does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our*

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<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel 36:24-25

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 17:3-7

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.europhysicsnews.org/articles/eprn/pdf/2005/03/eprn05306.pdf>

*hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us".* St. Paul reminds us that our true thirst goes beyond just seeking the fulfillment of material needs. It is God's love that satisfies our true thirst. The Holy Spirit pours God's love into our hearts. The Gospel account of the Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus emphasizes that when we're filled with God's love and grace, we're at peace. No grumbling. The Gospel highlights Jesus as the source of "*living water*," which represents the Holy Spirit and the grace of baptism, directly linking the water that Jesus promises to conversion and forgiveness of sin.

You can imagine this woman looking at him as he speaks, as she hears him say in the Greek translation, literally, "I am." I am he who you are speaking with. I am. She sees him. As she gazes upon him, she can't help but feel and know the love of God through his gaze, through the sound of his voice, through his very presence. She desires this living water. She desires to be complete, to be made whole, to understand herself as God understands her fully, to become that which she was created to be. Now she hungers and thirsts, no longer for this water and for not having labor to get it. Now she understands and that becomes what she hungers and thirsts for. Now she listens carefully to him. Now she can't help but go into the town, this town that reviles her, this town of people who made her so isolated because of her sins, that she had to go to the well at the hottest time of the day when no one else would be there. She runs to these people. She tells them about the presence of God having visited her, tells them about the truth she has learned and that the Messiah is there, that the kingdom of God has come.

This water satisfies the spiritual thirst that the woman—and all believers—experience, leading to eternal life. It is a conversation that touches on the whole of salvation history, of which she is not unaware, and points to the eternal covenant. Through encounter with Jesus, we become disciples with spiritual certainty that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We also see the world and others with new eyes and hear with new ears according to the gospel vision of life, becoming totally converted to that missionary vision and its promise. For the Christian, the primary act by which we receive the Holy Spirit is baptism.<sup>4</sup> The poured waters represent and actualize the Holy Spirit being poured into our hearts, giving us the gift of divine love, that we may love as God does, which means: even to the point of death: "*Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*"<sup>5</sup> However, for Baptism to be effective it must be received in faith. Lack of faith will impede the subjective effects of the sacrament.

*"If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts,"*<sup>6</sup> words that speak to the experience of the woman at well and her neighbors with Jesus. Their willingness to engage with Jesus, perhaps drawn to listen to him, indicates their capacity for hope which keeps their hearts from hardening. They are ready to discover greater meaning and purpose of their lives and become witnesses. "*We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world.*" This truth, revealed and believed by her and all the Samaritan townspeople, speaks to us of the outpouring of God's love as a force penetrating every aspect of a person's life.

Who could keep such hope quiet? As Paul says in the second reading from the Letter to the Romans, "*Hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.*" The Samaritan woman experiences the love of God in her encounter with Jesus, who knows her and still wants to drink from her jar. Her Spirit-filled heart then proclaims the good news for all to hear. Lent, as we well know, prepares us for Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. In fact, Lent only makes sense with the hope — the promise — of resurrection Sunday. Just as Jesus reminds the woman at well who she really is, in the loving heart of God, so too we are reminded of our identity and from where we ought to draw our self-

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<sup>4</sup> Acts 2:38

<sup>5</sup> John 15:13

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 95:7-8, Hebrews 3:15, 4:7

esteem. We, the baptized, are God's chosen ones, beloved, filled with the Spirit, and on fire to share the message of Jesus with others.

Before baptism, we were children of God in the sense that God created every single human being. We are in the same state as the Israelites in the first reading. We are not literally children of God in the sense that the sacrament of baptism makes us, as new creations, and that has profound effect. Something we don't often enough reflect upon and sometimes even reject, is that through our baptism we participate in the divine life of the Trinity because of the resurrection of Jesus. The Holy Spirit has an essential role in establishing, revealing, and helping us realize our identity as new creations. According to the scriptures, early church Fathers of both the east and west, and enshrined in Church teaching, we know we are the sacred sons and daughters of God and participate in the divine life of the Trinity through baptism. The Apostles viewed baptism as an act of drinking the Spirit: *"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and all were made to drink of one Spirit."*<sup>7</sup>

What follows, then, is an ongoing process of sanctification by which we, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, become increasingly conformed to the image of our God and Father in which we were originally created. This conforming process ultimately realizes its full potential as the just receive their promised inheritance in heaven when their own glorious transfiguration takes place in the new heavenly kingdom. It is both a moral and ontological ascent toward fullness of life and, ultimately, eternal life in communion with the divine, which was God's original intention for humanity all along.<sup>8</sup>

Is it any wonder that King David put it this way: *"As the deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."*<sup>9</sup> The real thirst of the Israelites, whether they knew it or not, was for union with God. That very same longing in the depths of every human being, for what had been lost. The desire to be authentically whole and in full communion.

Because Jesus was fully God and fully man and brings our humanity into unity with his divinity. And then with his ascension, our humanity is drawn up into the fullness of the divine life of the Trinity, and then when we die, entering our reward ultimately, full communion with God, the beatific vision. This is our perfection that begins right here in our baptism. Now, think about all the things in scripture that tell us about the Holy Spirit, that knows the depths of the mind of God. We participate in that. The Holy Spirit guides us and enflames within us, perfects us and draws us into deeper union in this life which is our path of holiness. Through the sacrament of Baptism,

we have a spiritual union with God by the effectual working and grace of his Spirit, who builds up our spirit into newness of life (CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA). The mutual indwelling of the Father in the Son is passed on to us who dwell in the Son (THEODORE) as we sweep clean our souls in the name of Christ (APHRAHAT). This spiritual union is similar to the union achieved in marriage (AUGUSTINE). In this marriage between God and his people, however, the bridegroom transforms the harlot he has chosen to marry (CHRYSOSTOM) into the glorious divinity that is his (GREGORY OF NYSSA).<sup>10</sup>

Because of our participation in that divine life, we are capable of extraordinary things, extraordinary by the revelation through the Holy Spirit of understanding the mind of God. Able to put on the mind of Christ. This isn't possible without baptism. Fullness of understanding is not possible without baptism. Baptism being the gateway. This is the ultimate vocation of humanity: to be drawn into intimate communion with the Trinity, restored and elevated beyond our original creation in God's image.

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:13, cf. Mark 10:38-39

<sup>8</sup> Joel C. Elowsky and Thomas C. Oden, eds., [We Believe in the Holy Spirit](#), vol. 4, Ancient Christian Doctrine (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 138.

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 42:1-3

<sup>10</sup> Joel C. Elowsky and Thomas C. Oden, eds., [We Believe in the Holy Spirit](#), vol. 4, Ancient Christian Doctrine (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 142.

So, when we talk about the fact that the children of God are in this world but not of this world, this is a recognition of the fact that though we are in our mortal lives in this world because of our baptism, we are no longer of this world. We are a new creation altogether. We have what the church calls a supernature, which means human nature is elevated and perfected by sanctifying grace to participate in the divine life, exceeding its natural capacities. It describes grace as inhering in and raising nature to a higher order of existence and operation, enabling supernatural acts like knowing and loving God directly through infused virtues (faith, hope, charity).

This is extraordinary. We are by no means ordinary. But this isn't magic. And it doesn't manifest in our lives, in our spiritual well-being, without our cooperation. It requires our understanding, our belief and our cooperation to allow fully the operation of the Holy Spirit within us and to open up the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the love of God bursting forth within us like a well that has no bottom of living water that satiates us spiritually and completely. We are no longer ordinary if we cooperate, if we remain in him, in God's love, in this pool of living water. If that's the place from which we live, if that's the new heart that beats within us. Who we are and what is possible for us and expected from us, which is made known to us in Scripture, makes complete sense in light of this truth about our divinization.

This is why it's always so firmly stressed that we, as we've heard already during Lent, listen to him. This is my beloved son. The woman at the well, in her soul, would hear these words - Listen to him. And what happens for her must happen for all of us. She opened her heart fully in that conversation, in that encounter with Christ. Just as we ought to do when we encounter Christ the living Word, in prayer, in the Sacraments. She did not just make room for God but opened her entire being. She presented him with her lack of self-esteem, her confusion about her identity, her questions related to faith, all began to be stirred up within her. She was completely honest with him. She began to question and he spoke the truth, so that she is drawn in by the love of God and begins to change.

As Jesus will say later, on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, when water was being poured out on the altar at the Temple: *“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me; and whoever believes in me, let him drink. As the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.’”*<sup>11</sup> Although spiritual writers repeatedly emphasize the spiritual truth that, ‘He thirsts for our love,’ and such a statement is brimming with truth, it’s far too easy to dismiss it as just a pious axiom. We must avoid that temptation. In both cases in the Gospel of John where Jesus asks for a drink, it is really an invitation to communion with himself. It is a request for us to show him an act of charity, an act of love, and in that way enter into the relationship of love he intends for us. In John 4, Jesus appears as a stranger, an unknown traveler parched from the rigors of the journey. In John 19, he appears as a condemned criminal about to die.

The human heart craves friendship, encouragement, and acceptance from peers, parents, friends, and colleagues. That is natural. We are not self-sufficient. We are made to live in community, in relationship - after all, we are created in God's image, and God is a Trinity. But even so, the opinion of other people is not a solid foundation for healthy self-esteem. If we base our self-esteem, our conception of our own self-worth, on the changing and superficial opinion of other people, even well-meaning other people, we will be unstable: constantly worried about pleasing other people, constantly nervous about achieving more things so as not to lose their good opinion, constantly anxious, afraid that they will discover the other side of who we are, the ugly side.

Each one of us has in varying degree, experienced the mountain-like steadfastness of God’s unconditional interest in our lives, but all of us need to experience it more.

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<sup>11</sup> John 7:37-38

We find in him [Irenaeus] the idea that while Adam and Eve were created without sin, they were still infants as far as their divine potential was concerned. They would have continued to progress toward knowledge and union with God had they not fallen into sin. Sin brought with it corruption and death and destroyed any possibility of true knowledge and union with God. Thus, the incarnation, when the Son of God became man, becomes the key to human salvation as the human and divine are united in the one person of Jesus Christ: "The Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ ... through his transcendent love, became what we are, that he might bring us to be even what he is himself." The cross on which the incarnate Son of God died defeats death and gives life to all who believe in him and are united with him.<sup>12</sup>

We need to build our lives on it. We need the knowledge of God's unconditional and redeeming love in Christ to penetrate every fiber of our being. To make that happen, God sent us the Holy Spirit, through whom, St Paul tells us, "...the love of God has been poured out into our hearts." We have a reservoir of divine strength and courage in our hearts, established at our baptism, and enlarged at our confirmation. We need to bring water from that reservoir and drench every sector of our lives with it: our relationships, our hopes, our fears, our dreams, our difficulties, our sins, our weakness. This is what the Samaritan woman discovered when she met Jesus at the well.

You and I, if we cooperate, if like her, we listen to him and do what he says, if we embrace the gifts and the power given us through our baptism, our confirmation, our reception of the Eucharist, if we immerse ourselves in the life of the Holy Spirit which is essential for any of this. We too with greater power can be the instrument in the hand of God to convert this whole city one by one. But first, it's ourselves that need to be certain as she was certain and allow him, allow the spirit, allow the Father to truly, fully, completely, radically transform us. This is the prayer of Lent. This is the prayer that makes us hunger and thirst for Easter. This is the truth that helps us understand fully what we have become because he became one of us, died for us, and rose again.

### Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
<b>Beatific Vision</b>	The ultimate reward of the faithful; the state of full communion with God and the perfection of the divine life begun at baptism.
<b>Divinized (Divinization)</b>	The process by which a believer is raised up to participate in the divine life of the Trinity through the grace of Christ.
<b>Infused Theological Virtues</b>	Supernatural gifts of Faith, Hope, and Charity that are poured into the heart by the Holy Spirit, exceeding natural human capabilities.
<b>Jacob's Well</b>	The historic site in Sychar, Samaria, where Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman and revealed himself as the source of living water.
<b>Living Water</b>	A metaphor for the Holy Spirit and the grace of God that quenches spiritual thirst and leads to eternal life.
<b>Massah and Meribah</b>	The places in the desert where the Israelites quarreled and tested God due to their thirst, prompting the miracle of water from the rock.
<b>Metanoia</b>	A radical conversion or change of heart and mind, exemplified by the Samaritan woman's transformation after meeting Jesus.
<b>Sychar</b>	The town in Samaria near the plot of land Jacob gave to his son Joseph where the encounter at the well took place.
<b>Supernature</b>	A state of human nature that has been elevated and perfected by sanctifying grace, allowing for direct participation in God's life.

<sup>12</sup> Joel C. Elowsky and Thomas C. Oden, eds., [We Believe in the Holy Spirit](#), vol. 4, Ancient Christian Doctrine (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 138.