

A Word From Fr. Tom Niehaus

March 15, 2020



“I’m Thirsty” My father grew up on a farm fifteen miles north of Burlington, IA. He was the oldest son of five children, four of them made it to adulthood. My parents were the only members of the family to have moved outside that area of Southeastern Iowa from their generation. As a result of this unique family dynamic we would usually take some annual vacation time in the summer and around Christmas to be with all of our extended family. As the youngest cousin and grandchild I enjoyed being able to spend more time with grandma and grandpa on the farm than the others. It was a treat to see my grandma working in the kitchen and getting meals together and tidying up the house. She always wore a certain style of blue and white apron as she worked and there was a certain smell of baked goods that hovered around the kitchen air. My grandpa was mostly retired from farming and because of his Parkinson’s disease he had terrible shakiness in his hands and voice. He would talk to me about being a good boy and would have a tear in his eyes when we were together. Sometimes in the summertime the Iowa heat and humidity would be intense and we would get thirsty. As a boy I didn’t need to ask for a drink of water, because I could help myself to a drink. We all liked getting a drink of water at grandma’s house. There on the counter was a pail filled with well water and hanging from the side of the pail was a stainless steel dipper. Oh how I enjoyed taking that dipper and getting a drink of that water. For some reason the well water had a certain iron taste to it that I can still recall when I am around certain types of water. There was no faucet to turn on and no reason to doubt the goodness of the water in that pail. My grandma had been filling that pail with water from the pump for years and everyone in the family who was thirsty would be satisfied. Taking that dipper and sipping that water at grandma’s house was refreshing! This week’s Gospel from John 4 is also about drinking water. Jesus encounters a Samaritan woman and says, “Give me a drink.” The woman recognizes Jesus as a Jew and understands that she as a Samaritan is considered unclean and should not be giving Jesus anything lest he be considered unclean too. Jesus then speaks of “living water” and says, “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.” Rather than Jesus getting a drink of regular water from the woman, the tables turn and the woman says to Jesus, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.” In her desire for deeper satisfaction the woman opens her heart to Jesus and the truth of salvation that will ultimately satisfy the longing of her heart. Jesus looks into the depth of the woman’s life and sees that she is wounded in love from being married and divorced many times. Jesus sees that she is coming to the well at the hottest time of the day to avoid the criticism of others. Shame and guilt cloud her motives, yet she is thirsty for true love. Jesus offers her an opportunity to slake her thirst by the water of the Good News and says, “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.” The woman demonstrates her faith in God as she declares her trust in the Messiah’s arrival. Jesus then reveals the truth as he says, “I am he.” Realizing that salvation is in her midst, the Samaritan woman’s desire for healing and unconditional love is acknowledged by Jesus. He reverences the Samaritan woman’s experience of pain and speaks the words of healing that will bring balm to her soul. Jesus similarly during this Lenten pilgrimage of 2020 wants to enter into our lives and satisfy our deepest longings. He wants to heal our wounds and speak to us about love and mercy. Where we are thirsty for forgiveness and renewal, Jesus will satisfy our longings with the living water that flows from the fountain of His Word in Sacred Scripture and Sacraments that flow from His pierced side. What are you thirsty for? Let Jesus quench your thirst.

Parish Communication There are many opportunities for collaboration in this Catholic cluster of parishes that we can develop and utilize. One of these areas of development is in communication. I have been a priest since 2008 and every assignment I have been in has included multiple parishes or a clustered grouping of parishes. At the basic level these parishes are bonded together by the fact they share the same priest, are located in a similar geographic area, and share similar ethnic/heritage characteristics. At the deeper spiritual level the people of parishes in our cluster are connected in their faith to Jesus Christ. The strength of a parish can rise and fall in the area of communication. It is important to me that the people of this Catholic area know what is going on, but also have access to a similar message. The bulletin and online resources that we support as parishes in our cluster should seek to have a unified vision and scope. As the primary priest and teacher of the faith in our area, it is very important to me that what is communicated to the parish has substance and is in line with the teaching of the Catholic Church. Since October 2019 our core staff has been meeting together for prayer and developing rapport and communication with each other. I am so thankful for the staff and leadership here at St. Patrick & Most Holy Redeemer/St. Canice parishes as they help to carry out our unified communication to the people of the area.

Thank You Much gratitude goes out to all the people in our area parishes who helped to make the Steubenville youth fundraiser a great success. The Set the Table event was my first and I was very impressed at all the people who came together to glorify God and support our youth in their desire to attend the Steubenville Youth Conference taking place on July 10-12, 2020. Please continue to pray for the youth of our area.

God bless you!

Fr. Tom Niehaus