

After seeing the sports organizations cancel their events, a non-Catholic friend at work this week asked me if I thought Mass would be cancelled today. At first, it seemed like an odd question to me because I don't view coming to Mass and worshipping our God as entertainment. But the question doesn't seem so odd if you think Mass is the same as every other activity in our lives. The question makes perfect sense if you think that Mass is the same as attending a sporting event or a concert or going to work or school. What my friend was overlooking and what the Church is trying to remind us of in today's readings are one in the same. There are two very different types of thirst that need to be quenched in this world. And unless we understand the difference between them, we'll always be frustrated and thirsty.

The first kind of thirst is horizontal thirst. This is the thirst for the things of this world - the desire for drink and food, the desire for companionship, fun, and entertainment, the desire for a nice house or car, a good income, or success at work or school. It's part of our human nature to desire these things.

But, the interesting quality of this type of thirst is that we can't ever really truly quench it. No matter what we do, we always thirst for more. We drink water then a little while later we're thirsty again. Oftentimes though, the more we try to quench our horizontal thirst, the more intensely we thirst. We drink from the well of entertainment then we thirst for amplified excitement, increased pleasure. We experience a small taste of success then we crave greater fame or fortune. We yearn for even more recognition or accolades. And our culture plays into this thirst. We're constantly bombarded with messages that we need more. Every effective marketing plan appeals to our desire to quench this thirst for more.

But we also have another kind of thirst. It's called vertical thirst. This is a deeper thirst, a desire for meaning and purpose in our lives. Like horizontal thirst, it's also built into our human

nature and can't truly be quenched by the things of this world. Only God can satisfy it. And He created us like that on purpose. It's as if He put a homing device in the very core of our being. It constantly draws us towards Him, towards intimate, personal contact with His eternal, transcendent love.

That's why when we have money, success, or pleasure, we're still thirsty. Our deeper, vertical thirst can't be quenched by the things of this world. The meaning and purpose which gives us true happiness only comes from friendship with God, not from worldly success, pleasures, and human relationships. When we forget that, we confuse our encounter with Christ during the Mass with every other activity in our lives. We unintentionally put ourselves on the road to frustration and disappointment.

That's what the Samaritan woman in our Gospel had spent her life experiencing. She had had five husbands and now she was living with another man who wasn't her husband. Her adulterous lifestyle made her a social outcast and pariah. We know this because of the time of day she encountered Jesus at the well. Noon was the hottest part of the day so women usually went to the well to draw water early in the morning when it was much cooler. She was at the well at noon so she wouldn't run into any of the other women.

Here's a woman living a life of frustration and alienation, of loneliness and inner turmoil. She had been trying to quench her vertical thirst with human love, comfort, and earthly pleasures. She had learned the hard way that this plan didn't work. She was still thirsty for a Savior. She needed to find the "spring of water welling up to eternal life." She needed to find "the gift of God." She needed to discover Jesus.

And she does. Jesus revealed Himself to her, and her life turned around 180 degrees. She ran back to the village announcing the good news to anyone she could find. This woman who

worked so hard to avoid others now didn't care who she came across. Her heart was on fire because she had met her Savior. She had to tell others about Him.

We know from the Gospel that Jesus and His disciples ended up spending three days there, and the whole town came to believe in Him. She and the people of her town had been wandering through a spiritual desert. Their souls were slowly dying from a thirst for more, even while they enjoyed material pleasures and prosperity. They were frustrated and living a life of meaninglessness. But Jesus changed all of that. We need to look no further than Jesus for the secret to happiness. Jesus Himself is the rock and the water flowing in the spiritual desert of this fallen world.

We all know that. That's why we're here today. The people that aren't with us here today only because they're sick or they received a dispensation from Bishop Talley from the obligation to attend Mass know this. We know that our encounter with Jesus during Mass is not the same as the excitement we experience watching a sporting event or listening to our favorite band in concert or even eating the tastiest meal.

We're not like the Samaritan woman when she arrived at the well. We already know Jesus. We've encountered His love and grace. In our Baptism, we've experienced the water that springs up to eternal life – the Holy Spirit who has “been poured out into our hearts,” as Saint Paul puts it in our second reading.

Even so, we still have periods in our lives when, like the Israelites in the desert, we struggle, we cry out, we get thirsty, and we need God to remind us of His power and His love. But we know where to turn in those moments.

As Saint Paul again says, we have a “hope that does not disappoint.” We have “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” So we aren't like the Samaritan woman when she first

arrived at the well. Rather, we're like the Samaritan woman after her conversation with Jesus. Like her, our hearts should be on fire because we have met our Savior.

Brothers and sisters, in today's world, we're the privileged ones. We're the countercultural ones who have met the Savior. We know that no matter what the advertisers say, horizontal stuff will never satisfy our vertical thirst. But sadly, so many of those around us don't know that. As a result, they're frustrated in life and they don't know why. It's up to us to tell them. All the Holy Spirit needs from us is a decent effort to spread the good news. He will use our clumsy words to quench their thirsty hearts – just as He used the Samaritan woman's words to convert an entire town.

At the end of Mass, I will dismiss everyone by saying, "Go, and announce the Gospel of the Lord." Are you ready to accept this mission?