

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

LECTIONARY #28

READING I Exodus 17:3–7

A reading from the Book of Exodus

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?"

Exodus = EK-suh-duhs

Moses = MOH-zis

The people are complaining. Let the assembly hear complaining in your voice.

Moses is frustrated. Sound more intense when you are saying "What shall I do . . . ?"

Pause before the Lord's answer. Proclaim his words in an informative tone.

Horeb = HOHR-eb

Massah = MAS-uh

Meribah = MAYR-ih-bah

READING I

Grumbling, questioning, quarreling, and testing the Lord—Israel's repeated complaining against Moses is actually a lack of trust, indicative of their rebellion against God. They doubted God and Moses, even though Israel had already experienced God coming to their rescue by freeing them from Egypt, opening a dry passage through the sea, and feeding them with manna in the wilderness. Throughout their journey, Moses has been their leader and mediator; now he is the target of their complaint. Psalm 106 paints a memorable picture of this people:

"They did not believe the promises; in their tents they complained" (verses 24–25).

The scene of Israel's grumbling begins with questions, the first two built on accusations against Moses, followed by Moses' own pleading question to God. The people's questions assign blame to Moses for bringing them into the desert, and even imply that his motive was to make them die of thirst. Moses' question to God expresses his own exasperation. The people's grumbling seems to have put Moses' faith to the test and even raised his fear that they might stone him. The series of questions is a liter-

ary means of drawing the biblical audience into the story by eliciting their own questions and reflecting on their answers.

Similar to other events in Israel's desert sojourn, this one recounts familiar human experiences that also have a symbolic meaning. Like physical hunger and thirst that is assuaged by food and water, so are spiritual and emotional hungers and thirsts assuaged by God's presence and attentiveness. Underlying the thirst for water, so scarce in the desert environs, is the people's thirst for God's saving presence.

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 95:1–2, 6–7, 8–9 (8)

R. If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD;
let us acclaim the Rock of our salvation.
Let us come into his presence
with thanksgiving;
let us joyfully sing psalms to him.

Oh, that today you would hear his voice:
“Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,
as in the day of Massah in the desert,
where your fathers tempted me;
they tested me though they had seen
my works.”

Come, let us bow down in worship;
let us kneel before the LORD who made us.
For he is our God,
and we are the people he shepherds,
the flock he guides.

READING II Romans 5:1–2, 5–8

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

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.

This wonderful letter from St. Paul gives us hope and proves God’s love for us. Proclaim with firmness and clarity.

Use a gentler tone.

This last line is important. Pause before you proclaim it and say it slowly.

Rather than punishing the ungrateful and rebellious people, the Lord directs Moses to take some of the elders and set out for Mount Horeb (also called Sinai), the Mountain of God (3:1). The Lord promises to be standing in front of Moses at the rock in Horeb, subtly and symbolically fulfilling the people’s unspoken thirst for God’s presence. When Moses strikes with his authoritative staff, water will flow from it for the people to drink. Surprisingly, the place is named not for the wondrous water that flows from the rock, but for the people’s persistent complaining. Massah means “the

place of testing,” and Meribah is “the place of quarreling.” Psalm 95, today’s responsorial, uses the scene to remind later generations not to repeat their ancestors’ testing and quarreling against the Lord.

The reading ends with yet another question: “Is the Lord in our midst or not?” Whether the question is asked by Moses or by the people, the answer, based on what the Lord has just done, must be “Yes! Amen!”

READING II Paul is writing to Christians in Rome, “who believe in

the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead” (Romans 4:24). God’s past action of raising Jesus from the dead has an ongoing effect in the present and gives believers hope of future sharing in God’s glory. Throughout today’s reading, Paul weaves together divine action and human benefit, past, present, and future.

Four references to God, three to Christ, and one to the Holy Spirit in these few verses contribute to Paul’s proclamation of “the power of God for salvation” (Romans 1:15). Christ’s death for us in the past is a manifestation of God’s salvific