



Archdiocese of San Antonio
Most Rev. Gustavo García-Siller



Homily – Feast of St. Teresa of Avila
October 15, 2014

Five hundred years is a long time! To celebrate the birth of a person whose influence continues in the Church and in the world for half a millennium is extraordinary! In his homily conferring the title of Doctor of the Church on St. Teresa of Avila, Pope Paul VI spoke of her as “the reformer and founder of an historic and eminent religious order, a prolific writer of great genius, teacher of the spiritual life, an incomparable contemplative who was tirelessly active.” She was all this and more, despite physical infirmities throughout much of her life and personal discernment about her mystical experiences and understanding of consecrated life.

The Holy Father also mentioned “the charism of wisdom, which makes us think of the most attractive and at the same time most mysterious aspect of St. Teresa’s title of Doctor: the flow of divine inspiration in this prodigious and mystical writer.” We hear echoes of this in today’s first reading from the Book of Wisdom. Solomon prays for the spirit of Wisdom which he describes as “an unfailing treasure; those who gain this treasure win the friendship of God, to whom the gifts they have from discipline commend them” (7:14).

In the Old Testament God's gift of his *torah* or Law is often described as flowing, spring water -- an appropriate, refreshing symbol in a parched climate for God's surprising revelation of himself to his people, especially in his word and wisdom.

The Gospel of John describes Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, as God's gift like a spring of water, welling up into eternal life. Jesus tells Nicodemus that "no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit" (3:5). Nicodemus, a scholar of the law, has difficulty understanding what Jesus means. After his night meeting with Nicodemus Jesus goes into the region of Judea where his disciples spend some time baptizing – like John the Baptist (3:22). The biblical text says that Jesus himself was not baptizing, but only his disciples (4:1). Then Jesus comes to a Samaritan town where he sits down about noon next to a well outside the village.

Jesus, the spring of water welling up into eternal life, asks a Samaritan woman for a drink of water! Unlike Nicodemus, the woman is unlearned. Unlike Nicodemus, she is also not dense! She proves that she can learn something from this Jewish man who asks her for a mere cup of water. She is initially surprised that a Jewish man asks her for a favor, and she protests. Jesus responds: "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." Fresh not stagnant water – cool and fresh and life-giving – capable of bestowing eternal life upon her!

While the biblical narrative emphasizes that she is a woman, a Samaritan, and an often married and divorced person, what is important for

our celebration of St. Teresa's feast day is that Jesus progressively reveals himself to the woman at the well and invites her to faith. He leads her to discover more deeply who he is and she responds by declaring him a prophet, the messiah, and, finally, the Savior of the world. Through her encounter and dialogue with Jesus, transformed by Jesus' healing words, she becomes a missionary to her people and introduces them to the Lord. She moves from isolation to faith to mission.

Jesus receives a mere cup of water and unleashes a torrent of healing, saving water that washes over the woman and cleanses and refreshes her – giving her a new lease on life. The living water that Jesus gives her nourishes her soul and her spirit with God's wisdom.

St. Teresa was on a lifelong journey that moved her more deeply into intimacy with the risen Lord. As a result she became a holy woman and has had great influence on the Church – as a woman, a contemplative, an active reformer.

St. Teresa was fully human, standing on her own two feet – in what was often a “man's world.” Like Mary, the mother of the Savior, she was courageous, dignified, and capable of great suffering. She was faithful, a woman of prayer, a woman of compassion, a disciplined woman. She did not retreat into a Carmel away from the world but strove to reform both herself and the Church. Her spiritual writings have nourished thousands of the faithful through the years.

We need to draw near to the Lord Jesus in these barren, arid, challenging times. We need courage and wisdom to undergo personal conversion and to reform the Church. We need to drink deeply from the

waters of salvation and to share God's words with all whom we encounter.
St Teresa, be at our side and continue to guide us!