

As many of you know, I'm a very competitive person – competition overflows into most areas of my life. One thing I'm careful about though – particularly when I'm dealing with people younger than me – is not falling into the trap that because I'm older than them, I'm further along my Christian journey than them. In fact, younger people quite often demonstrate a fullness of faith to which I aspire. Their curiosity, openness and desire to encounter Jesus is inspiring, and has a positive impact on my faith. That same principle applies not only to individuals, but to parishes. When we resist the temptation to think we've "arrived" because we've reached a certain age and instead stay open **to** and hungry **for** more of Jesus living water, growth follows.

Over the past 12 months, we've seen significant growth in multiple areas – particularly in our approach to **unity, lay-leadership, and shared vision**. This has led to an **upward trend** in three key areas: average **Mass numbers** each weekend, people **volunteering** in ministry, and **income** from the collection. We're growing in these areas because we've been united in vision — and because many have responded generously. The preaching series of Sacrificial Giving concludes this weekend with this video homily so that every person in every community is given the same invitation and opportunity to respond. The starting point as always, is what is God saying to us and asking of us through these readings?

Hope is the dominant theme running through the readings today. The Israelites, in their thirst, have lost hope. They're at the beginning of their faith journey, and don't yet trust that God will provide for them. Similarly, the woman at the well has lost hope due to isolation from her community. She's at the well at mid-day

because she's been ostracised and knows she won't encounter anyone at that time. But Jesus breaks through her hopelessness – and it's the same with the thirsty Israelites – by offering the kind of thirst-quenching water she didn't even know she needed – which is to say, His very self. “If **only** you knew what God is offering,” Jesus says, both to the woman at the well and each one of us.

Paul, writing in the second reading, gets it. He's fully conscious of what God is offering because he's experienced the living water. It's by Jesus himself, he says, “that we have entered this state of grace in which we can look forward **to** [and hope **for**] **God's glory**.” If you remember last week's Gospel, Peter, James and John got a glimpse of **God's glory** on the Mount of Transfiguration. God's glory is something we can hope for too. And this “**hope**,” Paul goes on to say, “is not deceptive, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, [who] has been given to us.”

But here's the thing about Christian hope: it's not vague optimism. It's confident trust in what God has promised — and active cooperation with His grace. Hope looks ahead with confidence in ways that move our feet. If you are baptised, for example, the Holy Spirit already dwells within you. But when we express our hope through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving — the Spirit's power becomes more active within us.

My **hope** for our parish is that every worshipping parishioner experiences the living water of Jesus and is transformed so-as-to become living water for the 150,000 who live in our parish. Most do not yet know Him. Most are spiritually thirsty. As our generosity grows, our parish's capacity for mission grows. When we give generously, the Kingdom advances both **inside** and **outside** these

walls. And so, friends, here is my ask/my invitation/my call to action. Each person at Mass last weekend was invited to pray about their giving and what God was asking of them over the past seven days. What did God say to you?

It's my **hope** – something I'm working toward - that for some, God is inviting you to begin giving regularly. For others, increasing what you give. And for many, it may mean moving toward percentage giving — setting aside a known portion of your income as an act of trust in God who provides, the Lord who is with us – Jesus Christ our Saviour.

I'd like to conclude by leading you in a simple prayer exercise wherein we actively listen to what God is saying to us. I'm going to invite you to close your eyes in a moment, to focus the ears of your heart on Jesus, and ask Him the question in relation to the theme of giving: "Lord, what are you asking of me?" As you ask the question, pay attention to the first concrete prompting you sense. It might be a number, word, image, or person. Whatever it is, trust that the Lord is capable of speaking clearly to you. Since all God's promises are Yes and Amen, may our response to God be Yes and Amen. Let's now close our eyes, centre our hearts and pray, "Lord, what are you asking of me?"