



Franciscan Action Network

Transforming the World in the Spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare

P.O. Box 29053 • Washington, DC 20017 • 202-527-7575 • 1-888-364-3388 (toll free) • 202-527-7576 (fax)

Third Sunday of Lent (March 27, 2011)

Reflecting on the Readings *and* Today: Water Welling Up

Franciscan Mission Service (FMS) missionary Nora Pfeiffer reflects on life in Bolivia today in light of the readings for the Third Sunday of Lent.

In reading the account from Exodus (17:3-7), I very easily imagine Bolivian farmers grumbling similar complaints about the lack of water. In September of 2010, I read an article in the newspaper about a 72-year-old woman from one of 100 drought-affected agrarian communities who had to start walking with her cattle every day to the only river in order that they could drink something. Never before in her lifetime had she seen such a bad drought. Just two months later, there was a report that the country's meat production fell 35% due to the drought reducing grass growth for cattle to feed on, so that in almost all the cattle their ribs were clearly visible. In January of this year, the farmers of the higher plains region of the country lost potatoes, quinoa, fodder and produce, and were aware of the real risk of losing their animals. Some observers have even named the drought a Natural Disaster.



Extended lack of rain has disrupted and in some places prohibited the planting of new crops for one of the countries in Latin America with some of the highest current increase in food prices. While I do not live in these rural communities whose daily livelihoods are so dramatically tied to the environment, I still feel frustrated and sad. I wonder, what we are supposed to do? Sometimes I question, like the people following Moses in the desert did, where is God in the midst of this thirst, this suffering?



Water's lack is not the only problem here in Bolivia. Just five miles from my house is one portion of about 9,000 families around the country who are living in tents in emergency camps due to the intense flooding that has destroyed their homes and agriculture and left them without an income to buy clean water. Imagine the irony of being surrounded by sewage and water, and yet there is still a LACK of potable water in order to drink, cook, bathe and wash clothes. Trucks and people are stranded in the floods in the northern region of Bolivia with produce (and incomes for the farmers) rotting, hunger, thirst, sickness and threats of deadly snake bites as the snakes search for higher ground. In some areas

the water is six feet higher than normal. There was news today of at least five camps that no longer have vegetables, meat or cooking gas, so the meals are insufficient and families are hungry.

Tuesday, March 22 is World Water Day. How fitting that the readings also focus on water, both the physical need for it by all life-forms and the spiritual thirst in each and every one of our souls for the only One who can reveal to us the truth of who we are and what our part is in building the Kingdom of

God here on earth. In a world where we, the people, tend to separate and divide ourselves from each other, the people's need for water in the desert with Moses and the Bolivians' need for water remind me of how linked, how similar we all are in actuality. Jesus too used water as a means to close the divide between himself, a Jew, and the Samaritan woman. Both went to the well out of human thirst. Jesus did not have a means to get water so he asked the Samaritan woman to assist him because she had a bucket. What does Jesus' position of need and request for help mean today for the human family, in which many are suffering natural disasters and lack of resources in such desperate ways?

After Jesus looks to the woman to help him get water, suddenly the tables turn and Jesus is the one who has the water, the "water welling up to eternal life" (Jn 4:14) in response to which the woman *leaves her water jar behind* in order to spread the news about this man who has water she does not have. The one who was the giver is now the one in need, the one seeking, the one opening up her heart.

I am fascinated by the way this story expresses both the humanity and the divinity of Jesus, all by means of water. While Lent is a great opportunity to remind ourselves to give God a chance to fulfill us, to quench the deep thirst every human has, it is also a time to be reminded of God's experience in the flesh and God's presence in every part of creation, crying out to be healed, to be whole again.

Daniela Zurita shares her memories of the "Water War" in Bolivia.

One thing I can say about the Water War in Cochabamba, Bolivia is that it was really striking to me because the entire city was shut down. The whole water issue started in January 2000 when water was privatized and prices went up by at least a 35 percent. Protesters started to speak out, but it was mostly indigenous people. They could not afford to pay \$20 or more per month for water when some of them don't even make that much money a month. The situation got worse around April. I remember I was at school, and we saw from the windows hundreds of people walking towards the plaza where the government offices for Cochabamba were. It was about three blocks from where my high school was. I remember that day we had to wait for our parents to pick us up because it was dangerous. There were people outside marching for blocks and blocks. Everything was cancelled. The city was shut down for at least four days. During those days people from all social classes start to come out and fight against the policemen. Policemen from other states in Bolivia had to come to Cochabamba in hopes that they could restore order to the city. But it didn't work; people fought it until the end.



To be honest, it was kind of scary. There were hundreds of people injured and, if I am not wrong, there were two deaths. The people marching and protesting had sticks and rocks to fight back the guns from the police and lacrimal gases that were thrown at people. The city was destroyed. There wasn't food coming in from anywhere, so for a few days we were lacking food and water. Nothing was working in the city: it was a complete shut-down. I still can't believe that at age 15 I witnessed so much abuse from our government so closely. I did not quite understand it back then, but now I do realize the oppression people in Third World countries experience. Water is an essential element to the survival of any human being, and denying it is just evil. Making water a luxurious thing for people is inhumane.

Responding in Prayer and Action

- 1) Learn more about World Water Day: <http://www.unwater.org/worldwaterday/>
- 2) Consider how you can use to Corporate Accountability International's resources on local access to water: <http://www.stopcorporateabuse.org/water-campaign>
- 3) As we reflect on how better to honor the gift of water, we pray with Franciscans International:

Forgive us, we pray, for the times we
have failed to recognize our relationship with Sister Water,
have not used water wisely,
have not called others to awareness,
have thoughtlessly polluted instead of protected our water sources,
have ignored the needs of our brothers and sisters around the world.

(Franciscans International, April 2005)