

Theology of water

A number of years ago, a Jewish friend told me an amazing story. One day, her little boy, who was about four years old at the time, said: “Mom, I remember living inside you. I remember falling asleep listening to your heart beat.”

Then he added: “And I loved it when you ate candy. Then all the water around me tasted sweet!”

I tell that story for a couple of reasons. In October, the month devoted especially to saying the rosary, I think of another Jewish mother, and another Jewish Son. I think it was sweet for Jesus inside the womb of Mary. Perhaps this is something else to meditate on while saying the rosary.

A second reason for telling the story is to remind us of the gift of water. Recently, a resident at Oak Crest told me a similarly remarkable story. She was scheduled to have surgery on her knee. As she was leaving her surgeon’s office, he said: “Drink water.”

The lady replied: “What do you mean? How much should I drink?”

He replied: “Try drinking four quarts of water a day.”

Needless to say, she was taken aback, but decided to try it.

She drank four quarts of water a day for 30 days, with remarkable results. First, the surgery on her knee was cancelled. She no longer had any pain in her knee. Next, she noticed that the pain in her arthritic hands was gone. She had suffered terribly from this pain. Now it too was gone.

Obviously, I’m not a medical professional. I can’t give medical advice. Please consult your doctor about drinking this much water each day.

But I am intrigued. I have increased the amount of water that I drink each day. And while too much of anything can cause a problem, I suspect most of us don’t drink enough water.

In recent months we have seen the destructive power of water, especially in Texas and then Florida. Yet, we are born in water. And we know that we can all live longer without food than without water.

Intriguing as well is the fact that water has such an important theological meaning. We Christians believe that in baptism we are born again of water and the Spirit. There is the cleansing aspect of water removing the stain of original sin. There is the life-giving aspect of water being the sign of the new life of grace. While there are many things that still sadly divide Christians from one another, baptism can at least be one thing that unites us.

I'll never forget, in the early days of my priesthood, of pouring water over an infant's head in baptism. Standing next to me was the big sister of the baby, and she whispered: "Father Joe, don't forget to wash behind the ears."

Science and religion both agree that water came before human life. They don't always agree on how and when that life appeared.

On that point I would like to close with a quote from playwright Tom Stoppard, who went from atheism to belief: "I've always thought that the idea of God is absolutely preposterous, but more plausible than the alternative proposition that, given enough time, some green slime could write Shakespeare's sonnets."