



Ask, Father James:

"...Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37).

Does this quote refer to the believer's physical heart or belly?

In another version of the above text, Jesus invites anyone who is thirsty to "come" to Him and "drink" and He promises "the one who believes in Him" that "out of their belly shall flow rivers of living water." What does this text mean by the believer's belly or heart? Will living water flow from one's natural heart or belly?

If one continued reading until v. 39, one would discover that Jesus was pointing to the expectation and fulfillment of the gift of the Spirit in the believer's life. The promise of Jesus is that the one who is thirsty should come drink from Him and if they believe what they drank from Him, their heart and belly will become wellsprings of living water flowing like a river. The physical reality of the dependence of human life on water points to the spiritual reality of the dependence of eternal life upon the Spirit.

Jesus made the above statement at the end of the festival of the booths. Moses had established the Feast of Booths as a reminder to Israel of how they survived their wanderings in the desert (Leviticus 23:33-44). The provision of water to Israel in the wilderness recorded in Exodus 17:6 and Numbers 20:8-13 was for them the hallmark of how they survived the hardship. A parallel of this text in the Old Testament is found in Nehemiah 9:20 where the people recounted that during their wilderness wanderings the Lord was faithful to give them "manna" and "water for their thirst. At the end of this feast, Jesus reminded them that Jesus alone is the source of living water for the thirsty and strongly emphasizes an inward work of the Holy Spirit in the believer.

This imagery of "thirsting," "drinking," and "flowing" in John 7:37-38 is interpreted to refer to baptism and the Eucharist. St. Ambrose (c.339-397) wrote; Drink of Christ, for He is the rock from which the water springs. Drink of Christ, for He is the fountain of life. Drink of Christ, for He is the stream whose torrent brought joy to the City of God. Drink of Christ, for He is peace. Drink of Christ, for streams of living water flow from His body."

Please email/send your faith questions to Fr. James and he will answer them in our Sunday Bulletins

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