

## A Chilling Encounter

On Saturday morning, the clock said 4:30 a.m. and the temperature said 20 degrees. Thoughts of leaving a warm bed had long evaporated as I anticipated a nice, hot shower. I sat on the commode and turned on the water in the shower like I did for years. Not a sound was heard; not a trickle of water volunteered, not an airlock to be heard. Just silence greeted me. I scurried through the house and checked the other three showers as well as the nine sinks. Again, I was met with no response. At least, I could see what I was doing, I assured myself.

I braved the chill and went to the church to see if there was water there and there was. I found a container and brought some to the rectory to help with my usual morning ablutions. Obviously, the church water blessed me. I put some water in the kettle and boiled it to help refresh my waiting skin.

My next morning chore was to shave. Some years ago, I had reverted to the traditional blade rather than the electric shaver. No problem, I thought to myself. I still had my old electric razor and it would do the trick. I found it, plugged it in and nothing happened. Now, I had to improvise with the traditional bladed razor. With some lukewarm water from a kettle nearby, I began my shaving ritual. Of course, the shaving foam had to be washed off the razor frequently so that it could continue to do its job. Instinctively, I kept turning on the tap to rinse off the razor and finally to wash my face. Instead, I had to cup some warm water in my hand and wash my face.

Following breakfast, I turned the tap on in the kitchen sink to rinse the dishes before putting them into the dishwasher. I should have known that there was no water but somehow, I lived in hopes that were dashed.

I ventured outside again to check any faucets and the main water supply. Everything seemed to be in order. Following morning Mass, I turned up the heat some more and opened up the attic to see if some of the hot air may reach in there.

Every few hours, I tested the taps but they yielded nothing in their stubbornness. Early on Sunday morning, I tried again to no avail. Washing hair and a body wash was an experience as I tried to boil the kettle to a manageable temperature. During the process, I kept turning on the faucet out of habit. I realized how conditioned I had become during my morning ablutions.

On Monday morning at 3 a.m., while some priests may be just going to bed, I hit the road in sub-freezing temperatures in anticipation of a nice warm shower later. My dreams were shattered as I encountered another morning without water. I engaged in another experience of improvised ablutions amid hopes for a better Tuesday. Finally, the city crew arrived only to inform us that it was not their problem. Efforts to find a plumber to replace the check-value spring proved frustrating. The final verdict: the brass casing of the check valve had cracked. Parts were replaced and the ceremonial turning on of the water occurred at 3:58 p.m. on Monday afternoon.

The whole experience reminded me of the days immediately after Hurricane Katrina when we were forced to compromise and be creative with whatever resources were available to us. Now, somehow, I was being reminded again of how far we have come and especially, how we have settled into a comfort zone that is filled with daily expectations that get the start of our day off to a routine start.

I am also reminded of a poem from Fr. Ed. Hays' book, *Prayers for a Planetary Pilgrim*. "Water, once clear and liquid, a joyous, flowing community is now frozen into crystals of ice." He goes on to reflect on the isolation of humanity. "Recently in humanity's long history there has arisen an isolation, a separation of those who share common human flesh and bone. While once upon a time we gathered joyfully in families, tribes and clans, we now so often live divorced from earth and from each other, with loneliness as our only company. All isolation is ice-olation, frigid to human flesh, cold and lifeless to the touch, untrue to our most basic unity, community."

This morning, I played TAPS, not on a military bugle salute at a funeral, but with the sounds of water gushing from taps that might even surprise Moses and his rock striking ability.