

Homily – *On the Way*

Water Security in a World of Competing Demands

Ludo Claude – 27 May 2026

PSALM 65:9-13, John 4: 5–15

Earlier this week, Geneva hosted the World Health Assembly — where nations gathered to discuss one of the most fundamental questions of our time: how do we protect human life?

And yet, beneath conversations about health systems, pandemics, development, and inequality, one reality quietly runs through almost everything: **water**.

Not only access to water. But safe water. Shared water. Secure water.

It is remarkable that in a city where global governance is debated at the highest level, one of the oldest biblical invitations still speaks with such urgency:

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters.” Isaiah 55:1

Tonight’s theme — *Water Security in a World of Competing Demands* — sounds technical at first. But each word carries moral weight.

Water is not only H₂O. It is life itself — biological, social, spiritual.

Security is not simply abundance, but dignity, resilience, and justice.

And competing demands speak to the tensions shaping our century: between cities and agriculture, growth and sustainability, present comfort and future survival.

So, the real question is no longer whether there is water.

The question is: who has access to it, under what conditions, and at what cost — to people and to the planet?

Three questions emerge tonight:

- **Is water merely a resource to manage, or a right to protect?**
- **Can cooperation prevail in a world shaped by scarcity and competition?**
- **And what kind of society is revealed by the way we treat water?**

Modern civilisation largely treats water as a technical and economic resource. Engineers build dams and desalination systems. Economists speak of scarcity. Entrepreneurs develop scalable solutions. And much good has come from this. Entire cities survive because human ingenuity learned to move, store, and purify water.

But there is another truth — older and deeper.

In Scripture, water is never merely a commodity. It is gift. In the Gospel of John, Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well and offers living water freely — crossing boundaries of ethnicity, status, and exclusion.

And this remains painfully relevant today, because nearly two billion people still lack safely managed drinking water. If water is life, then unequal access to water becomes not only an economic issue, but a moral one.

So perhaps the answer is neither control nor idealism, but stewardship.

Water must be managed wisely, yes — but also protected justly. Not ownership, but responsibility. Not extraction alone, but care. Water is not simply a product of the present; it is a trust passed between generations.

And if water is a shared trust, then another question follows: **can we truly share it in a world of competition?**

History gives reasons for concern. Water scarcity has often intensified division — from ancient river civilisations to modern geopolitical tensions around the Nile, the Jordan, or the Mekong. Scarcity can harden borders, deepen inequality, and fuel conflict.

Yet paradoxically, water also forces cooperation.

Unlike oil or gold, water cannot remain isolated. Rivers cross frontiers. Rain ignores political systems. Human beings remain profoundly interdependent.

Some of the most innovative forms of collaboration today emerge precisely where water stress is greatest: shared river agreements, community water systems, new technologies for purification and conservation.

Water reminds us that no nation, no city, no individual is truly self-sufficient.

And perhaps this leads to the deepest insight of all: **water is not only something we manage. It is something that reveals us.**

In the Bible, transformation often happens around water. Creation begins in the waters. Liberation passes through the Red Sea. Baptism marks belonging. Jesus meets humanity at a well.

Water becomes a mirror.

Do we waste while others thirst?

Do we protect or pollute?

Do we share or monopolise?

The ancient philosopher Heraclitus once wrote that no one steps into the same river twice. Water reminds us that life itself is fragile, flowing, interconnected.

And so, the way a society treats water ultimately reveals the kind of civilisation it is becoming.

A society that protects water learns to protect life.

A society that shares water learns justice.

A society that pollutes water slowly pollutes its own future.

As we leave tonight, perhaps the harder questions are only beginning.

In a century of climate stress and rising demand, will water become the next frontier of inequality — or the foundation of a new solidarity?

Will water be governed only by market logic, or also by moral responsibility?

And perhaps most importantly: **can humanity learn that true progress is not measured only by what we control, but by what we preserve together?**

Because ultimately, the question of water is not only about survival.

It is about the kind of humanity we choose to become.

Amen.