

## **The Third Sunday of Lent – March 11-12, 2023**

This week we will be passing through the half-way mark of the Lenten season. The goal and purpose of the Church in giving us this spiritual season is that with the help of the disciplines of prayer, fasting, and charity we would more deeply examine and purify our thoughts and actions and daily lives as disciples of Christ.

It is not easy to do this – to look more honestly at the truth of our weaknesses, failings and sins as well as our gifts. And yet, the saints tell us that the more we acknowledge and accept our limitations before God, the greater God can come to us.

“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble,” said St. Peter. The French religious sister, Catherine de Bar, writing in the 17<sup>th</sup> century said, “If you humble yourself and acknowledge your weakness, all heaven will come and pour itself into your soul and you will overflow with so many graces that you will have enough to convert the whole world. -- No one can know or taste God except in humility.” -- So – only if we empty ourselves can God fill us with his graces and gifts.

But what can give us the courage to entrust ourselves completely to God’s love and mercy during this season of Lent? The answer can be found in today’s wonderful scripture readings.

First of all, in today’s first reading. There, for a third time during their journey through the desert from Egypt to the Promised Land, we hear the Israelites complain against God and Moses. This time they are in a place where there is no water for themselves or their livestock. For their failure to trust that God is with them as he promised, we might have expected God to punish them, but we hear that despite their grumbling, God gives them water to drink. God is patient and merciful with them.

In today’s second reading Paul proclaims the good news that: “God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Christ died for the helpless and the ungodly, not for the good and the just.

He died for the grumblers and those who dared to test God and doubt his goodness. In other words, Christ died for the thirsty.

In today's Gospel Jesus meets a woman at a well where she has come to draw water and tells her that he has a living water that will quench thirst forever. God wants to give her and all of us a water (which is the Holy Spirit) that will quench all our thirsts, bodily and spiritually. And this water is so abundant that it will overflow from those who have it to all those who are thirsty. The question is will we ask for this water? Do we have that humility and hope in God that will move us to ask for this water to quench our thirst.

God wants to give us this water. He is not put off by our sins however great they may be. He can handle our sins, but he can only help us if we come to him and ask him.

Just as he did with the Samaritan woman, Jesus is reaching out to meet us at the well. Do we have the courage, the spunk, and the curiosity and perseverance of the woman to engage Jesus in dialogue that she had? If we are hesitant to do so, it might help us to look more closely at how Jesus dealt with her and how he will actually deal with us.

In the meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan woman, we have a story with many levels of meaning. One of those comes out later in the story when this woman, who started out speaking sarcastically in response to Jesus, ends up becoming an evangelizer of others. She leaves her water jar and quickly goes to spread the word about her conversation with Jesus, making many converts among those to whom she speaks.

But the key in this whole story is the way that Jesus listened. He sat and patiently began a conversation with someone who disagreed with him, gently listening and responding, even breaking a religious law by talking with her as a woman and drinking from her jar. He did not lose patience when she was sarcastic and hostile.

Being a woman and a Samaritan put her on the lowest level of society. Being involved in the public scandal of having had five husbands made her even more of an outcast -- which is why she came to the well in the middle of the day when others would usually not be there. Yet Jesus listened to her, talked with her in public, and offered her acceptance, compassion and dignity – things which everyone desires. These things are even more difficult to find for those on the lowest level of society.

When the disciples returned, they were amazed that Jesus was talking to a woman. It causes a scandal in their minds. Jewish men did not converse with women in public. The difference in cultures further divides the two. Jesus, who is Jewish, and the woman who is a Samaritan should be on opposing sides. Their people were long-time enemies. The woman should have turned around when she saw Jesus sitting by the well. She should have avoided scandal. Instead, the woman stays at the well and her life is forever changed. Her persistence demonstrates that breaking some rules is not always a bad thing. Risking all to encounter Christ is, in fact, exactly what we are called to do. Hopefully today's reading will help us be open to having our own honest and humble conversation with Jesus.

On the other hand, how are we like Jesus reaching out to others, even those who were hostile to him? In this story, Jesus shows us how we are to behave and to whom we should reach out and listen. One step, a conversation with one person can have far-reaching effects. Who is it that we might have a conversation with, listening to their story, perhaps even to their hostility and sarcasm, and quietly exchanging ideas? It may not change a whole society, but it can make a difference far beyond the two people who sit together like the man and woman who spoke to each other at the well. – *“If today you hear God's voice, harden not your heart.”*