

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent

We hear today the story of Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well. We are meant to identify with this woman in this archetypal encounter with Jesus. We are all in her place. We are all being drawn into the power of what Jesus offers.

I highly recommend that you all read through the 4<sup>th</sup> Chapter of John's Gospel in order to catch all the nuances and details of this beautiful account.

Nothing is accidental in John's Gospel, all the details matter. First of all, Jesus is passing through Samaria. That, in itself, is worthy of our attention, because pious Jews of the time tended to go around Samaria. Samaria was filled with half-breeds. These were Jews, who had intermarried with the Assyrians, who had invaded the land many centuries before. They were seen as unclean and unworthy. So, very pious Jews went around Samaria when going from Judea in the south to Galilee in the north. It is very important to note that Jesus does not go around Samaria, He goes through it.

Jesus loves the unclean; Jesus loves sinners; Jesus loves the marginalized and outsiders. He still passes through their country, even today. ***And he sits down by a well.***

I mentioned last week in my homily how mountains are trysting places in the Bible—where humanity goes up and Divinity comes down and they meet. Wells, in the Old Testament, are very strongly associated with marriage. Think, for example, of Isaac and Rebecca. Abraham sends messengers ahead and they sit down by a well and they spy the beautiful Rebecca. And then she becomes the wife of Isaac. Jacob meets his wife Rachel at a well. Moses meets his wife Zipporah at a well. So we can see the theme of the well as another kind of meeting place, where people meet and come together.

What is being proposed here is a marriage between Jesus and the human race. The Samaritan woman symbolizes all of us. Jesus wants to marry us. He is the bridegroom and we are the bride to use that imagery.

We also hear that it was about noon. John, at key moments in his Gospel, will specify the time of day; nothing is accidental with him. What's happening at noon? First of all, it is the hottest part of the day. And we will get back to that. Secondly, it is the most brightly illumined time of the day, when the sun is at its height, its zenith. Something of great importance is going to be illuminated now in the course of this story. The light is on full beam.

We hear that a woman of Samaria came to draw water. And Jesus said to her: ***"Give me a drink."*** Now, this is a very strange thing to occur because in the society of His time, men and

women did not speak publicly. Jews had nothing to do with Samaritans. And thus, this was a highly unusual thing to do—for a man to be so frank and direct with a woman. Notice, too though, he is inviting her to be generous. ***“Give me a drink.”***

St. Augustine said so magnificently that this is God thirsting for our faith. Yes, indeed, it is also God thirsting for our generosity, because our generosity makes us joyful—or it should. The trouble with sin, in all its forms, is that it is a lack of generosity. So Jesus is now saying to this woman: ***“Give me a drink.”*** And she reacts: ***“How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?”*** She is acknowledging how very unusual this is.

And Jesus answers: ***“If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you ‘give me a drink,’ you would have asked him and He would have given you living water.”*** NOW we are getting right to the heart of it!!!

***“If you knew the gift of God.”*** Isn’t that wonderful? That is who Jesus is! Jesus is the gift of God! God is a giver of gifts and full of Grace. If you knew that, you would have asked him, and he would have given you ***“living water.”*** Living water—especially for desert people—what a powerful symbol of liveliness, hope, and vitality that was! It is a symbol here of Grace—the ***living water of Divine Life*** which we lost through sin; we lost through a lack of generosity. Jesus now is saying: I can give you this living water.

She still balks: “Are you better than our father Jacob—whose well this is? You don’t even have a bucket, how can you give me living water? Jesus responds: ***“Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”***

Is that not a great thing!!!

Whoever drinks the water from the well will be thirsty again. Now we see how right St. Augustine was, when he saw the well as the desire of our base self. And we would say just as well today: addictive desire.

We are all wired for God; we are built for God; we are ordered to God. But, then we seek satisfaction of that deepest longing through worldly things, through created goods rather than the Creator Himself.

And in so doing, we become, ipso facto, addicted to those things. We go back to the same well of money, power, pleasure and honor every day. We drink from that well and we get

thirsty again, because none of that, good though it may be, none of that is God. None of it is meant to satisfy us completely and ultimately.

This woman coming day after day, in the heat of the sun, drawing water painfully from this well, is symbolical of all us who are seeking for love in all the wrong places (as the song goes). We seek for the Divine Life in all the wrong places.

What I want to give, Jesus says, is water that will never run out; water that will quench your thirst definitively. That is the Divine Life, Eternal Life!

We are meant to feel something as we hear this story. All of us are the woman at the well. As a Lenten exercise, I ask that you take some time to reflect and determine for yourself what this “**well**” is for you. What is that well you go back to again and again seeking satisfaction to no avail?

My dear brothers and sisters, HEAR the voice of Jesus—***“I want to give you water welling up to eternal life.”*** We are all meant to be participants in this conversation with Our Divine Lord.

Next we have this beautiful transition: Jesus said to the woman: ***“Go call your husband and come back.”*** The woman responds: ***“I do not have a husband.”***

Pay close attention now, the story is about to come together for us. We need to ask and answer some important questions first:

Why has this woman come at the worst time of day to draw water and why is she alone? The custom for women of that time was to come to well together, as a group. It was a time of camaraderie for them. And they would come for water in the early morning or in the evening, when the sun wasn’t so hot. Drawing and carrying water was very hard work.

So now we begin to see why this woman has come alone and at the worst time of day—because she is probably a woman of ill-repute. She is someone who is morally suspect; an outcast among her own people.

She has had five husbands and the man who she is living with now is not her husband. BUT, please notice, Jesus does not begin this conversation by raising this fact with her. He does not begin with condemnation. He begins with an alluring invitation to life.

Once she is drawn in by the gracefulness of his invitation, then she is ready to hear this truth.

What do we hear from Jesus? The invitation to **LIFE!** But once we hear that invitation to share the Divine Life—we know that we **HAVE** to change; we know that **ALL** that is opposed to the

Divine Life within us, has to go! We are then enabled, encouraged, empowered to look honestly at our sins—as this woman does.

She responds: ***“What you said is true.”*** She willingly acknowledges it. And then says: ***“I can see you are a prophet.”*** In the beginning of the story, he was just an annoying, puzzling man. But now she has come to a deeper perception. He is a prophet, a speaker of the Divine Truth. Then she goes on further to say: ***“Our ancestors (The Samaritans) worshipped on this mountain, but you people (The Jews) say the place to worship is Jerusalem. Which one is it?”***

She is asking this prophet a teasing question.

And Jesus’ great answer is this: ***“God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. The days are coming when we shall worship neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem, but in spirit and truth.”***

WORSHIP! Worship is the central theme of the whole Bible. Sin is bad worship—it means that I have placed something other than God at the center of my concerns. And that is why we go back to the well over and over again. That is why we get caught in those rhythms of addictive desire.

What Jesus offers now is TRUE WORSHIP—in spirit and in truth. He wants us aligned to Him. He wants our hearts and minds aligned to His heart and His mind. In being so conformed to Him, our worship will bring the whole of our lives into complete harmony.

The woman at the well begins to get this as she says: ***“I know that the Messiah is coming. The One called the Christ. When He comes, He will tell us everything.”*** YES, the one who will reveal to us the great pattern of life and living.

In John’s Gospel, at the very beginning, we hear: “In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, the Word was God.” Word, in Greek, LOGOS—it might be translated also as “pattern.” The one who will reveal to us everything we need to know and how to “pattern” ourselves after Him.

She is beginning to sense that this strange figure by the well might be the Messiah. And Jesus says: I am he, the one speaking with you.” The Greek he uses is ***ego eimi***: “I am,” echoing Exodus 3:14, ***“I am who I am.”***

God has come into the flesh and now it is time for our marriage to Him; now it’s time for right worship; now it is time to get your whole life ordered according to Him and HIS purposes—and then you will find water welling up in you to Eternal Life. This story is about us all and how we are to get our lives properly ordered. **We marry Him; we listen to Him; we drink from the**

**LIVING WATER that He offers us today and every day; that ocean of grace available to us from Him in the spiritual and sacramental life of the Church!**

- Fr. David M. Chiantella