

Third Sunday of Lent March 19, 2017

Readings: Exodus 17:3-7; Romans 5:1-2, 5-8; John 4:5-42

The scriptures constantly remind us of the continual and personal love of God towards each one of us. On the third Sunday of Lent the church invites us to enter into this love of God and respond to him positively. God himself initiates the move in every person to bring them closer to him through the gift of the Holy Spirit. One of the recurring themes throughout the Lenten season is the compassion and mercy of our God that conveys his love. Repentance on the part of human person indicates the recognition of this love and his readiness to make reparations. This requires a spirit of sincerity and a sense of honesty to self and recognition of our nothingness before God. Once a person has accepted this change, God has a ready mission prepared for him to continue to spread his love. In the Gospel of today, Jesus encounters the Samaritan woman at the well and gives her the living water. With this she and the people of the place are able to trust and accept the eternal life he gives them. They recognize him as the messiah, the savior of the world. In the first reading from the Book of Exodus we hear of God giving the people of Israel the water they need to quench the thirst. Moses was commanded by God to take the elders with him and to strike the rock with the staff. Then, miraculously, water came out of the rock. Paul in the second reading tells us that faith, hope and love are God's gifts to us. We are all God's chosen people called upon to live purified lives and God's love was poured into our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit that has been given to us through Christ. Thus today's readings are directing us to take a good look into ourselves and experience the divine insight.

Today's First Reading from the Book of Exodus tells us that God presented the people of Israel with living water from the rock. It consisted of one of the three events found in the Old Testament that speak of people thirsting for water. Already they were witnesses to the first event in Mirah where Moses turned bitter water into sweet water. The second event, the one mentioned today, took place at Rephidim. Being without water, Moses was commanded by God to take the elders with him and to strike the rock with the staff. Then, miraculously, water came out of the rock. The third event took place at Kadesh where once more Moses was commanded by God to assemble the congregation and to command the rock before their eyes to yield its water. Here once again people exhibit spiritual weakness and grumble against God and Moses. God displays great patience both with Moses and his people. As

biblical history tells us, Moses did not trust in the Lord. Because he struck the rock twice, he was punished and not allowed to enter the Promised Land. Moses is the care taker of the people who provides them with food and water. But essentially it is God who provides them with water from the rock, the place least expected and gives them the support, while Moses is his instrument. Once again everyone has the evidence that God is in their midst.

Today's Second Reading tells us of God's love poured into our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit that has been given to us through Christ. The Divine love of God assures salvation to those who are justified. Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus. Through our peace with God, our reconciliation replaces our alienation that was caused by the disobedience of Adam. Paul explains that Christ died at the right time for the ungodly as they were weak and were unjustified. All human persons were sinners, incapable of doing anything that could make them right before God. By the grace of God, all received the free gifts of faith, hope and charity that are instrumental in leading them towards salvation through Jesus Christ. He tells them that faith and hope enable to be open to the love of God, the Father pours into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Here Paul assures that rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. Here he corrected himself, showing his sense of humour. Maybe someone would die for a really good person. Maybe a father would give his life for a son. Maybe a man would give his life for his brother or a woman would give her life for her sister. But while such is possible, none of these self-sacrifices led to salvation. For there is one Mediator between God and man and he is Jesus Christ who has sacrificed his life for us.

Today's Gospel Reading echoes the First Reading from the Book of Exodus concerning the living water and tells us how God communicates his divine life to believers. Jesus promised the unnamed Samaritan woman the living water, that will become a spring of water gushing up to eternal life and the grace to recognize who he really is. The passage tells us that Jesus and his disciples came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Tired of His journey, Jesus sat on the ground by Jacob's well while the disciples had gone to the city to buy food. While he was resting, a Samaritan woman came to draw water and Jesus naturally asked her to give Him water to drink. The Samaritan woman strongly reacted saying how he as a Jew could ask a Samaritan woman for water, as such a thing was not acceptable. The Jewish people considered the Samaritans to be unclean, this including their utensils used for eating and drinking. Knowing the Samaritan

woman's hesitation, Jesus told the woman that only if she knew the gift of God, and who it is that is talking to her she in turn would have asked him for the water which he would have given her. The gift Jesus was speaking was about himself. The story indicates that God's love knows no social boundaries, and the water and bread that Jesus gives us life and sustains us. However, this is God's gift not just to us, but to all people. The love of God cannot remain idle but has to reach out to others. Here the Samaritan woman was called upon to share this incredible gift of God's abundant love with everyone, which she does with fidelity.

Jesus uses the water as a metaphor to teach this woman the lesson of grace and forgiveness. He speaks about the living water, which gives eternal life, divine grace, which is God's life within the soul. The woman craves for this type of water, because she wishes to have eternal life although she misunderstood this at first. Jesus now has a lengthy but candid dialogue with her. He makes her understand that she needs to confess her sins and change her life before she can obtain this life-giving water, grace. She insists that he must be a prophet to know the secret deeds of a person. Jesus then reveals to her that he is the Messiah. Once she is given a share in the mystery, the Samaritan woman's spirit is enlightened, accelerated, and illuminated by Jesus. She now realizes what it means to take freely of the water of life, which is the spiritual refreshment that comes into her soul after her encounter and confession with Jesus. Not only was she impressed that Jesus knew all her sins, but she was also given the opportunity to have those sins forgiven. She believes he is truly the Messiah, the Anointed One. She repents of her past misdeeds and goes back to tell her family, friends, and neighbors how she met Jesus and how he revealed his knowledge of her sins and his offer of live-giving water, which brings eternal life. The Samaritan woman doesn't appear again in scripture. But in many ways, the story of the Samaritan Woman is a turning point in the Gospel of John. It marks the end of Jesus' teaching to only a select few, and begins His wider ministry. She is the first person he talks to who knows nothing about Him. In fact, after He meets her at the well and first talks to her, she is transformed into a new person and his contact leads her to a life of grace.

When we reflect on this episode we see how this story begins with Jesus showing himself as a person in need: tired, hungry and thirsty. We are surprised to see how genuinely human he was and asks help from a person he was supposed to avoid, namely a strange woman and also a Samaritan. She is also surprised at his approach but her surprise allows Jesus to turn the tables and offer her living water of grace. But the water that Jesus will give is

different unlike the water from the well. He tells her that those who drink this water will never be thirsty again as it gives eternal life. The woman thinks in human terms and hopes she will never have to trudge to the well again. Jesus now invites the woman to do something more, to come to receive the water with her husband. Jesus' mission to these people begins with reaching out to a family. But she confesses that she has no husband. Jesus reveals her true situation: she has had five husbands and the man she is with now is not her husband. She was not a woman of good reputation and must have been deeply despised by people around. No wonder she came to the well alone and not in a group. The water that Jesus promises is closely linked to conversion and forgiveness of sin but first sin must be accepted and acknowledged. The woman at the same time is surprised at the insight of Jesus about her personal life. Soon she will become the agent of their salvation and conversion.

The Gospel Reading of today concludes by telling us that the people came from the city to hear Jesus in large numbers. They came to believe in Jesus because of the woman's witnessing and the words he said to her. Then they asked him to stay with them and teach them. Perhaps he would otherwise have continued on his journey. Jesus often needs to be invited to stay as he did on the road to Emmaus. However at the end, having been convinced of the person of Jesus they tell the woman that they believed in Jesus not because of what she said but because they themselves heard him and that they realized he is truly the Saviour of the world. Jesus was clear with the woman at the well about what was right and wrong in her moral life. That gift of the truth helped to set her free and helped her to begin experiencing the freedom of life in the Spirit. He had already told her that the well of Jacob, a holy place will become irrelevant. So will the Temple of Jerusalem, holy to the Jews, or Mount Gerizim, holy to the Samaritans, or the well of Jacob where they are. True worship will be done in Spirit and in truth. There will be no more temples or holy places. He clarifies that it is not places which are holy but the people who use them. It is we who are the Temple of God and the dwelling place of Christ.

From today's readings, we are reminded that as children of God, as members of the Body of Christ, we too have been called to do the Divine Will of Him who has called us to share in the life-giving Spirit through faith in Jesus. As Jesus was called to complete His work, we too are called to complete our calling through our perseverance in the living faith. To persevere necessitates our openness to receive him. It is so extra ordinary to see how an outsider, adulteress, a person considered sinner by others is the first person to receive

the identity of the messiah. The disciples in the meantime are amazed and puzzled to see Jesus talking alone to this woman and a despised outsider. They don't know how to respond. They offer food to Jesus but they are told he already has food they know nothing about. Jesus' food is his total identification with the will of his Father and doing his work. "Happy are those who hear the word of God and keep it." God's love is the food of life and we cannot live long without it. God's loving presence can be found in the bread that is God's gift sustaining us in the work we do as Christians.

The richness of the story is found in the dialogue between Jesus and the woman. It is a story about revelation, communication and relationship. It is also a story about God, Jesus and boundaries. Jesus shows himself as the living water to be shared by all. This Story introduces many crucial themes that pan out in the rest of the Gospel. The first and most important fact is that Jesus has begun His Ministry, and will impart His Word to people He meets. Another important issue raised in this story is the fact that Jesus talks to any person in society, ordinary or elite. The Gospel says that Jesus confronts the Samaritan woman at noon, which is the hottest part of the day, and an unlikely the time to draw water from a well. It is hinted at that she may be someone who is not liked in her community. The Disciples themselves wonder about Him talking to her. Certainly, she was one of the discards of the society, it becomes clear that Jesus will talk to anyone, not just the Pharisees, or other priests but anyone who needs him. A further point that the story raises is the fact that people believe in Jesus when He first speaks to them and they listen to him attentively to be his disciples. A relationship with the Lord in spirit and in truth can keep us open to more consistent, ongoing refreshment from the Lord. To this shocked woman Jesus reveals his true identity and she becomes his messenger.

Horror gripped the heart of a World War-I soldier, as he saw his lifelong friend fall in battle. The soldier asked his Lieutenant if he could go out to bring his fallen comrade back. "You can go," said the Lieutenant," but don't think it will be worth it. Your friend is probably dead and you may throw your life away." "The Lieutenant's words didn't matter, and the soldier went anyway. Miraculously, he managed to reach his friend, hoisted him onto his shoulder and brought him back to their company's trench. The officer checked the wounded soldier, and then looked kindly at his friend. "I told you it wouldn't be worth it," he said. "Your friend is dead and you are mortally wounded." "It was worth it, Sir," said the soldier. "What do you mean by worth it?" responded the Lieutenant. "Your friend is dead." "Yes Sir," the soldier

answered, "but it was worth it because when I got to him, he was still alive and I had the satisfaction of hearing him say...."Jim...I knew you'd come."

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