

Third Sunday of Lent: Sin Complicates, Jesus Simplifies

The way of sin complicates our lives. The way of the Lord simplifies our lives.

A thirsty Jesus stops at a well in Samaria, just outside of one of the Samaritan towns. He may have been physically thirsty, but as the reading progresses it is obvious that he is thirsty for much more than water. He is thirsty for souls. Later on when he is hanging on the cross he will say, "I thirst" but he rejects what is offered to him. He is thirsty for souls.

A thirsty Samaritan woman is at the well. She is there to draw water perhaps for washing, perhaps for cooking, certainly for drinking. She is thirsty, but she does not realize how thirsty she is. It is only after the dialogue with Jesus that she realizes how thirsty she really was. She was an intelligent woman, willing to spar with this Jew who asks her for a drink. When he tells her that if she asks he can give her living water, she responds that the patriarchs, Jacob and his descendants needed to drink from the well, along with their children and flocks, was Jesus greater than them? He tells her that he can give her water that will well up to eternal life. This is where the conversation gets really interesting. He tells her to call her husband. She responds that she doesn't have a husband, and he says, "You are correct. You have had five husbands and the man you are now with is not your husband." This truth hits her. She calls him a prophet because prophets proclaim the truth, then she tries to engage him in a theological debate over where God should be worshiped, in Jerusalem or on the Holy Mountain, but Jesus' statements have struck her in the core of her being. She puts down her jar and races to the town to tell people that she thinks she has met the Messiah. They could see that there was something different with her. They go to see Jesus, and believe in Him not due to what the woman said, but in their own experience of meeting him.

The way of sin complicates our lives. The way of the Lord simplifies our lives. You can imagine how complicated the woman's life was. She is not called a widow. She is a woman who has been married five times and now is living with a sixth guy who isn't even her husband. She probably had a lot of children and maybe even had to ask herself which children

belonged to which man. She was probably seen by other townspeople as a little better than a prostitute. She had to be in turmoil considering what her life had become. But now, with this Jesus, her life was simplified. The husbands and the live-in were no longer the focus of her life. She wanted the eternal life that was being offered to her. Suddenly, everything seemed simple. She melted. She accepted him, and then became an evangelist. She ran to town to tell others about Jesus. They also were touched, first by what she had said, and then, far more thoroughly by what the Lord himself said to each of them as he penetrated their lives.

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A person is a liar and a thief. He uses his prowess in business to cheat others. He is always on the defensive, claiming that he did not lie, did not cheat, and then claiming that what he did was no different than what everyone else was doing. "O what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive." (Side note, a lot of people think that this quote is from Shakespeare, it was actually written 200 years later by Sir Walter Scott in his play *Marmion*.)

A Teen tells his or her parents that he is going to study over a friend's house, but this is a lie so he could go to a party. He has to get his friend and his friends siblings to say that he was at their house studying. He has to make up a story that the friend's parents had gone out and weren't there when he arrived and when he left. And one lie builds on another lie. And his life becomes complicated.

A married person gets into an improper relationship with someone. He or she has to hide this relationship from his or her family. Both the spouse and the third person are tying up his emotions into a knot. He never thought his life could be so complicated. That is what sin does.

There are many examples of people who have thrown themselves into emotional turmoil by giving in to sin. There are also many more examples of people who have found peace in their lives through their determination to live the way of the Lord.

The way of the Lord is the way of simplicity, of living a simple life.

Jesus himself could have courted the many factions of his time pitting them against each other. He could have appealed to the Temple priests, supporting what he knew was their false worship in order to seek their protection from the Pharisees, or from the Herodians or even from the Romans. Then his life would have become complicated. Instead, he lived a simple life of proclaiming the truth regardless of who may or may not agree with the truth. He gives us an example of Divine Simplicity, just holding onto the truth. We see the same thing in all the saints.

When we think of simplicity among the saints, we naturally think of St. Francis of Assisi. He had been a soldier and was even held as a prisoner of war for a brief time. He joined in with the wild bachelor scene of his day. He was slotted by his father to take his place in the merchant class. Francis was well aware of the turmoil of his time that he would be expected to join. But then God called, and Francis listened. In that famous scene in the main square or piazza in Assisi where Francis gave back to his father his clothes, he did not just embrace poverty. He embraced the simple life of Jesus Christ. He learned to enjoy the presence of God in the beauties of nature. He led others away from the noise of his society to Jesus Christ. Divine Simplicity led him to pray, "Make me an instrument of your peace."

One of my favorite saints is St. Thomas More. He had been chancellor of the exchequer under Henry VIII in sixteenth century England. He had to deal with running the country, with court intrigues, with attacks on the faith by the reformers later called Protestants, and so forth. But Thomas kept his eyes on living the truth of Christ. This eventually cost him his life as he refused to go against his conscience and declare that the King was the ultimate authority of the Catholic Church in England. His letters from his cell in the Tower show him to be at peace even as his death approached. (If you would like a real Lenten treat, dig up the old Oscar winning movie, *A Man for All Seasons*.)

We all know many people who refuse to let their lives be complicated by everything happening around them or even to them. These are the people who are at peace. We want to be like them. We need to be like them.

God provides all good things for his people. But we have to want to

share in his goodness. Our eternal thirst cannot be quenched unless we are willing to drink the living water of Jesus' life. Evil cannot be conquered unless we want to conquer it. Yes, the first step to conversion is made by God who meets us at the wells of our lives and calls us to living water, but the second step to conversion is made by us who must respond by changing our lives.

How well am I responding to the call to living water. How well are you responding? This is what Lent is about. We spend the serious season looking into ourselves and seeing how well we respond to God. At the same time we understand that conversion is a process. We spend time during Lent looking into our lives and purifying ourselves of the obstacles we have placed to the living water. We need to quench our eternal thirst. We consider how sin has complicated our lives. We seek simplicity. We seek forgiveness. We seek the Lord.

We have many opportunities to receive the sacrament of penance during Lent. The Lord gave us this sacrament to help us to simplify our lives.

The way of sin complicates our lives. The way of the Lord simplifies our lives. May we have the courage to step away from the turmoil. May we have the determination to live in Divine Simplicity, to live in the peace of the Lord.