

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

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 saviour of the world.

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.

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.

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. 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.

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. 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 tells them about Jesus.

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 and now on she is the messenger.

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.

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.

This real story is said of the German concentration camp during the Second World War. In the camp were a group of rabbis and learned Jews along with persons who had been in high standing prior to their arrest. They had to work for six and half days every week but on Sunday afternoons they were left in relative peace. One such afternoon some of the learned Jews in their despair decided to put God on trial. The rabbis acted as judges and witnesses came forward for defence and for the prosecution. The case for the prosecution was overwhelming. They had only to look around them: they were being wiped out as a race; many of their families had already died in the gas chambers. They were unable to look for their dear ones. How could a good God allow this to happen? The judges, despite a stout defence had no difficulty in reaching the verdict. God was guilty as charged, guilty of abandoning his chosen people. Silence fell upon the court. Then an elderly Jew got to his feet and said: "Nevertheless, let us not forget...it is time for our Evening Prayers."

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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