

Homily-3-Lent-A-Scrutiny-1-2024.docx

We use John's Gospel passage of the woman at the well every year if we have Catechumens preparing for Baptism at the Easter Vigil, because the story paints a picture of a change of heart, of a turning away from a past life and beginning a new life as a disciple of Jesus. This passage is a great presentation of the dynamics of the conversion process, describing our souls struggling to rise from the things of this world to belief in Jesus.

In the arena of faith, we know from thousands of years of experience with encounters with God, that God initiates, and we respond. That's what we see today in this story. Jesus is already at the well. In the same way, he's already there in the course of our everyday experience.

As this woman seeks, she's already been found. As she comes to the well, Jesus is already there. In our quest for God, it is not us who chooses God, but God who has already chosen us. If we would only surrender to the God who is always already there looking for us, we would be in the right space. So when we as seekers, or our friends or family members who are seeking God, are twisting themselves into pretzels trying to figure out how to find God, how to seek him out. That's not the primary question - the primary question is "how do I allow myself to be found by the God who is always already looking for me."

I think the most important thing to notice in this passage is that, as we seek, we've already been found. Picture the well in this story as all the things that we seek to find satisfaction. The woman is a seeker - we all are - and like all of us who have thirsts and hungers, we seek all kinds of things.

The well in this story reminds us of all the many and various, frequently flawed desires we have. We keep trying to fill our needs - the deepest longings of our hearts - with something other than God - with something less than God. It doesn't work and it has frustrated us humans over many, many generations, and it leads to addictions to whatever we put in God's place - money, power, prestige...

Jesus says, everyone who drinks of that kind of water - the "other than God" water, will be thirsty again. Ask any addict.

If you drink from the well of **wealth** trying to satisfy the deepest longing of your heart, you'll get thirsty again. If you drink from the well of **power**, you'll get thirsty again. If you drink from the well of **approval**, you'll get thirsty again, because all of these good things, and they can all be good things, fade away, wear off, run out. Our true thirst is for an infinite good, and all of these earthly goods fade away, wear off or run out.

What is the one reality that never runs out? The one well that never runs dry? The divine life, which is precisely what Jesus offers to the woman at the well. God is infinite, God never fades away, wears off or runs out. This living water is the revelation of Jesus, and the Spirit he promised us.

The water that Jesus offers this woman is a symbol of the Church in its fullness - its teaching, its preaching, its sacraments, its saints... All that the Church offers us is meant to convey to us the divine life, which never fades away, wears off or runs out. That's the well you want to drink from. That's the one. God is always there to offer this grace. Go to that well.

But before this water can flow into our life, we've got to remove some obstacles. Jesus knows this and addresses some moral issues in this woman's life. Notice that he doesn't start there - he doesn't start with moral correction. Like Pope Francis says, to welcome someone into the Church, you don't start with the rule book and condemnation. You first say "hello."

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The Church *does* meet people where they are, but we don't leave them there. From thousands of years of experience in our faith tradition, we know that the spiritual life can't get off the ground unless certain moral issues are dealt with. We're all sinners, and this great gift of Lent moves us all to ask ourselves: is there something in me that's blocking the flow from this well of living water? What is it? As Fr. Ron said at our parish mission: what is holding me back? What do I need to let go of?

In the case of the woman at the well, there are some issues. And Jesus isn't exactly the non-judgmental nice guy with great makeup and perfectly done hair. He's direct and he's blunt. And he even brings up the subject of sex and cohabitation! But this is good news that we all need to hear - how to strengthen what is good and holy in us and to remove what is sinful or weak - not because our faults get in the way of God's love, but because our faults get in the way of us loving him back.

We all need to hear that before this living water can flow into our life, we've all got to remove some obstacles - whatever in our life has to be dealt with before we can be fully present at this Mass as Jesus taught us - to worship in spirit and in truth. We know that Jesus is the place of right praise and right worship - and Jesus is waiting for us here at this well of living water.

In this parish, we have people in the final period of the Rite of Christian Initiation, called the Period of Purification and Enlightenment. The purpose of this period, for them and for us all, is to strengthen what is good and holy and to remove what is sinful or weak. At this time, I invite our Elect, those who are preparing for Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, and their Godparents, to come forward.

- Deacon Jack Schaefer