JMJ

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT – A/B – 2021

This story of the woman at the well is one of my favorites. It shows the human side of Jesus in his tiredness and thirst; and it also shows us His divine knowledge of human nature and His loving care for an individual soul, the soul of this woman of Samaria.

She had come to the famous well of Jacob to draw water, water that she’d need for washing and cooking and drinking, water to sustain her life. She came at noon, the hottest time of day. She didn’t come earlier, when it was cooler; probably that was to avoid the other women. Having been married five times and living with someone who wasn’t her husband, she probably wasn’t all that well thought of.

It was a God Thing that she came when she did. I think Jesus arranged it, so that He and she could be alone for a while. He asked her for a cup of water; He was tired and thirsty. But Saint Augustine said that what He really thirsted for was her faith. And little by little Jesus drew this woman into a deeper and deeper conversation, to the point that she became convinced that He was the Messiah. And, with that, she became so excited that she ran back to the town to share this news with the very same people that she had been trying to avoid. The Gospel tells us that she left her water jar there at the well. She didn’t need it so much anymore, because she’d been given to drink of the Holy Spirit, that “spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Without water we die, don’t we? Some of us got a little taste of what it’s like to be without water, during those very cold days a couple of weeks ago. Pipes froze and broke, and people were without water for drinking or washing or cooking or flushing. We need water for all kinds of things. And we also all need the kind of water that only God can give, the kind that doesn’t come in a bottle, the kind that comes through faith and Baptism.

There’s a story told about Michelangelo, the famous Renaissance sculptor. One day he saw a block of marble that the owner said was worthless. “It’s not worthless to me,” the sculptor said. “There’s an angel imprisoned in it, and I must set it free” (Quotes and Anecdotes).

Michelangelo had a fine eye for possibilities, but not finer than God’s. God sees possibilities in everyone. No one is worthless in God’s eyes; not that woman at the well and not any of us. God sees the potential saint in every sinner.

We see it in this story of the Samaritan woman; how Jesus brought her from being a suspicious, lonely sinner to a model believer. With just a few words spoken with kindness, He chipped away the dross and brought out the loving evangelizer, who carried the good news of her discovery to the very people who hated her the most.

That can be our story, too. Maybe it already is. To encounter Jesus, to be touched by Jesus, to be changed by Jesus. That’s how it happens. First, to encounter Jesus: just one on one, in daily prayer. Second, to be touched by Jesus: to allow Him to touch our wounds and heal them, and not conceal them from Him, for whom nothing is hidden. And third, to be changed Jesus: so changed that we want to go and tell the others – the hungry and thirsty others – where the true Bread and the living Water can be found.