

19 Third Sunday in Lent Year A March 15, 2020
Exodus 17:3-7 Psalm 95 Romans 5:1-2,5-8 John 4:5-42

Wells and watering places have a singularly important meaning among people living in arid regions. After a drought, water miraculously restores life to a desert-like earth and revives humans, animals, and plants alike, rescuing them from death. For this reason, the Old Testament prophets often spoke of *living water* to signify the gifts that would flow when the Messiah finally came (Zechariah 14:8; Ezekiel 47:8-10).

In today's Gospel, Jesus reveals that He is the *living water* for our journey. The revelation that Jesus is the *living water* begins on an ordinary day. A Samaritan woman picks up her heavy water jar to make her daily trip to Jacob's well. We notice the woman does not have a name, maybe because she really represents all of us in some way.

As the woman approaches the well, she sees a man sitting on the edge of the well and talking to a group of men. It is important to note that they are sitting at Jacob's well, a place where important events have taken place in Jewish history.

As we read about this encounter, we see the patience and love Jesus has as He brings the woman to believe in Him as the source of *living water*. In stages Jesus reveals who He is to the woman. When the woman approaches Jesus, she is shocked when He speaks to her and asks her for a drink of water. Jesus is making an earthshaking statement. By His talking to the woman, Jesus declares that no one is an outcast to God! No one is beyond God's love! No one is beyond redemption!

Jesus speaking to a woman is a clear violation of the strict Jewish laws. The woman responds, "*You are a Jew,*" but she softens her voice with a certain curiosity, wondering who this man is. That is because there is a long-standing barrier of hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans.

Jesus says to her, "*Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty.*" The woman is astonished to hear that Jesus could provide her with water that would last forever. The woman refers to Jacob's gift of water but Jesus makes a distinction between ordinary water and a spring of *water welling up to eternal life*. The woman's respect for Jesus is slowly growing and she calls Him, "*Sir.*"

Jesus leads her to look at her deeply troubled life and help her to unburden her soul. Without a note of condemnation, He accepts her and gives her hope. The woman perceives that Jesus is a special person and addresses Him as "*Prophet.*" Jesus tells her that in the days to come, true worshipers will worship *in spirit and truth.*

Soon the conversation turns to her having five husbands, or worshipping five gods, because the Greek word for god is husband. The false gods failed to bring her and her people happiness. She is thirsting for her true God who will bring happiness to her and her people. It is at this moment when Jesus says, "*the one you have now is not your husband.*" In saying this, Jesus is referring to Himself.

Thirsting at the words of Jesus, the woman expresses her belief in the Messiah who is to come. The woman is referring to the Book of Deuteronomy. Jesus says to her, "*I am He, the one who is speaking to you.*" Imagine the woman's shock when Jesus says that *He is the Messiah, the Promised One of God.*

After meeting Jesus, the woman leaves her water jar behind and immediately runs back to the village to proclaim that the long-awaited *Messiah* has come. She then leads the people back to the well to meet the promised Messiah, Jesus, for in the Book of Deuteronomy, it is written: "*to Him you shall listen.*" Many in the town also receive *living water* as they in turn encounter Jesus and come to believe in Him themselves.

The woman's conversion gives us great hope in this Lenten season, because in human terms, a worthwhile life is beyond her because of her past. Yet her past does not hinder her from coming close to Christ. Jesus wins her over with His love, by gently leading her out of herself, and by raising her mind and heart to a higher spiritual level. At Jacob's well, Jesus, by asking for a drink of water, changes her life. May our hearts also thirst for Christ, the fountain of *living water.*

In leading the people to Christ, the Samaritan woman becomes the first missionary. Christ's saving work is not intended for a limited group but for all who come to drink the waters of life.

Our response is to also be missionaries to give new life to others. It should be one that will lead us and others to drink deeply of the *living water* of life, the source of life-giving water which is found only in Christ. Our response should be to bring others to Christ to encounter Him. Jesus came to give us life, eternal life, the very life of God,

through a personal relationship with each one of us. It is our calling to live this life with others.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is showing us how to approach people who are broken and wounded, not as someone superior but as someone who is humble. Such people who are already ashamed of themselves do not need someone who will make them feel even more ashamed, but someone who will give them hope and reveal to them they have value, they are unique, precious and important. To accept and love broken people in this way is the surest way to help them to grow.

The woman has to first make her confession and be open to Jesus before she can receive the *living water*. Similarly, we have to make our own confession and be open to Jesus before we can receive the *living water* Jesus offers us in the forgiveness of our sins. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or Confession, Jesus offers us limitless forgiveness and healing. He knows our sins long before we recognize or confess them, but He waits for us to come to Him, just as Jesus waited for the woman at Jacob's well.

As we progress on our journey through Lent, we continue to receive this *living water* through the celebration of the Mass. Here at our Mass we experience the cleansing, renewing power of Christ through His living Word and His living Sacraments. Like the Samaritan woman, we have the assured presence of Christ. Here we have more than a time of personal prayer. Here we join our prayer to the prayer of our Church. Here in our Mass may our hearts thirst for Christ, the fountain of *living water*.

The Samaritan woman and the townspeople listen to Jesus and respond. How *our thirst* becomes satisfied depends on how we choose to respond to Jesus' living words. This offer of *living water* is given to us today, let us drink freely of this life-giving and refreshing gift that Jesus has given us. Jesus has living water that will bring life to your life, as He did to the Samaritan woman.