

Third Sunday of Lent: Thirsting for the Lord

She really was quite intelligent, this Samaritan Woman that Jesus met at the well. She engaged Jesus in discussion about Jews and Samaritans. She asked him, "Why do you bother talking to me? Jews don't speak to Samaritans." She even engaged the Lord in a bit of a theological argument, "We worship on the Mountain, you worship in Jerusalem, so who's right?"

She was also a hard worker, not a lazy woman. She was at that well probably to get the water she needed to clean her home, or perhaps prepare the afternoon meal. Her life was difficult, but probably no more than any other woman of her time and place. But her life was different. She had gone through five husbands and now was living with a man she had not married. No one respected her. She didn't respect herself. She had given up on herself and just gone with whatever the immediate situation presented. Another husband, another man. Another child. Whose the father of this one? Of that one? She had learned to live with the emptiness that comes from accepting sin in her life.

She was thirsty. It may have been her sheep that needed the water, maybe she needed to draw water for the afternoon meal, but she herself was quite thirsty. She was dry. Internally, spiritually, she was thirsty. She had led a sinful life but had refused to acknowledge her sins and seek forgiveness. Perhaps, like many of us, she felt that the past would go away if she just didn't think about it. But that didn't quench her thirst. She went about her daily routine, doing her best to ignore the emptiness within herself. But it was still there. There was that thirst, that dryness.

A thirsty Jesus goes to the same well. He sees the woman and thirsts even more. He also is dry, but he is not empty. He thirsts for the people who need him, even if they don't acknowledge him. One of his last words from the Cross would be, "I thirst". He was not talking about water. He was speaking about the overpowering desire within him to bring God's love to the world.

At the well, Jesus simply tells the woman that she will remain dry unless she confronts her past and changes her life. These are the words she needed to hear. She submits to the Love of God. From that moment on she is absolved, transformed. Her thirst is quenched.

She goes into the town. Her joy is on her face. The townspeople experience her peace and want this for themselves. So they go out to the well to meet Jesus. They go to investigate. They experience God.

This wonderful drama, the first of three we will hear the next few weeks, is really a drama about our lives. We thirst for God. Sometimes we drink Him in. Often we ignore Him. Sometimes we downright reject Him. But He doesn't give up on us. Perhaps we finally give in and let Him transform our lives. We confront our sins, take responsibility for our actions, and allow the compassion of the Lord into our lives. Then

we have that joy that pours out from us to everyone around us. And then others seek out and find Christ.

We will probably be thirsty again. With the distractions of our lives, it is easy for us to lose sight of the fundamental reason for our existence, to know love and serve God. With the pressures of our society, the responsibility to provide for the family financially, the mission to raise our children, the fight against sickness and suffering in our lives, it is easy to lose sight of why we are doing what we do. As a result we feel thirsty, dry within. With the pressures of the anti-Catholic, anti-theistic, immoral aspects of our society, it is relatively easy for us to give in to arguments that justify improper or immoral behavior. It is easy for us to return to dryness.

We will thirst again. And in one way, this is good, very good. It is part of the human condition to thirst for God. St. Augustine wrote, "Our hearts are made for you, O God, and can not rest until they rest in you." We will always thirst for a greater presence of God. We seek his presence throughout our lives, particularly in the love of others, in the love of our families, in the love of those reaching out to us for help. Many of you seek God in the love of your marriages, and your children or, for the children, in their parents' love. We will all always thirst for a greater presence of God in our reading the Word of God and our sharing in the Eucharist.

We need to take this thirst with us wherever we go. We need to bring the longing for Jesus with us so others can experience the joy the very longing for His Presence forms in our lives. Remember, the townsfolk only experienced Jesus because they first experienced the joy of His Presence in the woman who had just returned from the well of God's Love and Compassion. We cannot be afraid to let all know that Jesus is the joy of our lives.

Some times people ask me, "How do I bring Jesus to the school, to the workplace, to my family, to the neighborhood?" If we focus on His Presence in our lives, if we recognize the Mercy and Compassion we have received, others will experience Him within us.

There is a famous Latin expression, "Nemo dat quo non habet." It means "you cannot give what you do not have." You cannot bring God to others if you do not have Him yourself. The opposite of this expression is also true. It is powerful and life transforming. "We cannot help but give Him who we have." If we have the Lord, then we cannot keep Him from others. Our very being will not allow us to keep the joy within us secret.

We join the Samaritan Woman this Sunday in proclaiming the joy within us. We continually experience His Love, His Mercy and His Compassion. Now, world, go out to the well, and meet the Source of our Joy. Let His mercy and compassion into your lives, world. Allow Him to transform you from putting up with life to living in the Joy of the Lord. Go out to the well, world, and meet Jesus.

