

HOMILY FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT, YEAR A.



**EXODUS 17:3-7, PSALM 95:1-2, 6-9,
ROMANS 5:1-2, 5-8, JOHN 4:5-42.**

WE ARE INVITED TO BRING OUR THIRST TO GOD.



When two people from hostile communities or nationalities meet for the first time, they can soon become overwhelmed by real differences between them. Differences in personality, background, religion, politics, and nationality can all contribute to making the encounter short, sharp, and hopeless. The two people may be unable to face each other honestly because the barriers between them seem insurmountable. Nothing will happen unless one of them takes the initiative to overcome the difference between them. And nothing will come of that initiative unless the other person is intrigued enough to respond.

A man and a woman meet at a well beyond the edge of town. They are strangers — not only because they have never met before, but because they should never be meeting at all. He is a Jew traveling through foreign territory; she is a Samaritan on home ground. Their peoples have been estranged from each other for centuries, and that ancient hostility has been kept alive by each generation. According to their own traditions, they should remain strangers to each other. But will this man and the woman allow that estrangement to dictate their attitude to each other? Will they rise above the mutual hostility of their own tradition and face each other's hostility?



In today's Gospel, John tells us who Jesus is: the Messiah and the Savior of all peoples. But first, He shows us Jesus as the weary and thirsty traveler who wants to make inroads into people's lives. No matter who they are. It is Jesus who makes the first move, expressing His need for a drink from her. Thirst knows no boundaries. The woman is taken aback that a Jew, no matter how thirsty, would bother to ask a Samaritan for a drink. Jesus expects her to be a "good Samaritan and His expectation confuse her. He then intrigues her by suggesting that if she knew His real identity, she would ask Him for living water. The fact that He has no bucket worries her, but the water Jesus has to give turns into a spring inside the people. Thinking that Jesus has here for

thirst, the woman calls Him “sir,” and now imagine she can avoid trekking to the wells in the middle of nowhere.

Jesus now changes the discussion to what has been her deepest need., He focused on her track record with men. She has a thirst for meeting Mr. Right, but the thirst has not been satisfied after five husbands. And she is living with another man. Clearly, this woman is familiar with disappointment in love; clearly, she is still hoping to meet the right man who can fulfill her deepest needs. Now she is facing a man who is not just another man. She knows that. She now calls Jesus “prophet”. He is a man who knows who she is and yet leaves her in a heap of pain. He doesn't call her names; He doesn't reprimand her; He merely states how things are. Even at that, the woman still wanted to change the conversation. Jesus leads the conversation back to where it was. The truth. How can you worship God if you don't face the truth about yourself? What kind of cosmetic worship are we talking about that is not linked to whom it may concern people are and how they are?



So, Jesus tells the woman who He is. And in telling her who He is, He gives Himself away to her. He gives her the living water — so she can go home without her buckets and jars and face her own people. She leaves Him to handle His bewildered disciples while she runs off to tell the town about the man who revealed her to herself. She does not keep her experience a secret. She turns her experience of Jesus into a message for others. Jesus has freed her to carry His message for others. Because of her the whole town come to meet Jesus. Many believe in Jesus because of her story; many more come to believe in Him when they meet Him for themselves. She is the summary of how people come to understand Jesus: first as a Jew; then as a prophet; then as the Messiah; then as a Savior of the world. She is one of the first witnesses of John's Gospel who leads others to Jesus. Her past does not hinder her from being a messenger of Good News. She has a story to tell. At long last she has met the right man.

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, in the sacred season of Lent, we are invited to acknowledge our thirst and our need for God. Let us not mask it or hide it with distractions or goods which cannot ultimately satisfy. We are invited instead to bring our thirst to God.

