



Homily Notes for the Third Sunday of Lent

(John 4:1-30)

The story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well is a lesson in Divine Mercy. Jesus did not come for the righteous. He came to call sinners to repentance, and repentance allows us to receive an outpouring of grace, the living water of which he speaks. In this passage, we discover the lengths to which Jesus will go to seek out those who are suffering for their mistakes, so that he can restore their dignity as children of God, their peace of heart, and their hope of salvation.

- It was no chance, random meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. Jesus did nothing by accident. He and the disciples arrived there, "tired by the journey," as John notes. Jesus may have rushed them along in the heat of midday, to reach the well near Sychar in time to encounter this outcast woman. He sat down by the well and ordered his disciples to go into town to buy lunch. He needed to speak heart-to-heart to the Samaritan woman, and such a conversation would not have been possible with a group of scowling, scandalized disciples lurking nearby.
- Why would the disciples be scandalized? Devout Jews did not speak with Samaritans, and social protocol cautioned against speaking to women outside one's family. But this woman had even a third strike against her: she was a notorious sinner, an outcast in her own village. She had been married five times and was now living with a man who was not her husband. This explains why she went to Jacob's well to draw water at noon, despite how oppressive the sun is at that hour. At noontime she could avoid the cold stares and malicious whispers of the other village women who would gather at the well in the early morning and early evening to socialize while filling their water jars.
- This poor soul is clearly embittered about her situation. Despite Jesus' gentle demeanor, she immediately adopts a sarcastic attitude: She challenges Jesus, *You're asking me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?* That's followed by another putdown: *You offer me living water, but you don't even have a bucket!* And another: *Jacob gave us this well. Do you think you're a greater man than he?* What's going on here? It seems as if she has built a hard shell around her wounded heart, using sarcasm and brash talk to hide the woundedness caused by her sins. She's tried to make herself impervious to any further pain from her self-righteous neighbors and the Jews who view Samaritans as an underclass of humanity.
- Jesus knows her deep-seated suffering. He sees past the tough façade and invites her to acknowledge her sin so that he can offer her the living water of his divine life. He reveals to her his identity and mission – more fully and clearly than he does to most others. This revelation

confers great dignity on her. He has elevated her to the role of an apostle to her village, bearing the Good News of the Messiah's coming, and of salvation for Samaritans, as well as the Jews.

- "I have not come to call the righteous to repentance, but sinners." (Luke 5:32)

Jesus knows the weakness of the human heart. He knows that our fears – often arising from a lack of trust in God's love and support – can lead us into grave sin. Fear, not cruelty, is the force that motivates the majority of abortions. Teens and young women are afraid to tell their parents about their pregnancy for fear of disappointing them, or fear of being rejected or punished. They fear not being able to complete their education and the loss of the future life they had planned. They fear that they lack the resources and maturity to care for a baby. They fear that an adoptive family may not love their child as they would. Some single fathers want to marry their pregnant girlfriend or at least support their child, but others fear that they'll be stuck with the young pregnant woman they never planned on marrying and stuck paying child support for 18 years. Parents whose daughters are young or still dependent on them, fear the struggles their daughters may face in trying to raise a child alone; they fear that their daughters will be kept from reaching their full potential when their studies or career are sidetracked by an unplanned pregnancy. Some parents fear how their friends will react to the family's "shame" of an out-of-wedlock pregnancy. And expectant parents whose unborn child has been diagnosed with a serious genetic condition, may fear that their child will suffer in life, that they won't be capable of caring for a child with special needs, or that the emotional pain of carrying a child to term only to witness its death will be more than they can bear.

But in every case, our Lord is ready to provide all the grace and help we need if we simply ask him for the courage and strength to act in ways that affirm the priceless gift of life. He willingly died for us. Why do we doubt that he'd help us through any crisis, that he'd bring people into our lives who can offer the support we need through difficult times?

And should we fail to do the right thing, sacramental Confession is always available to us. There we come face to face with God's Divine Mercy – Mercy that forgives our worst sins, removes our guilt and our shame, fills us instead with God's grace.

- If you know someone who has lost a child or grandchild to abortion, or was in any way responsible for an abortion, and now suffers from remorse or sadness or simply doubts that God can ever forgive them, please let your friend know about the Church's post-abortion ministry, called Project Rachel. The diocesan Project Rachel office makes referrals for confidential counseling by specially-trained priests and lay counselors to help anyone involved in an abortion find forgiveness, peace, and hope once again. More information can be found in your bulletin [and on our parish website]. Bring the good news of peace, hope, and salvation to someone who is wounded by abortion and see their lives transformed, just as the Samaritan woman and the village of Sychar was transformed by encountering Jesus.