

Homily for the 3rd Sunday in Lent

March 14-15, 2020

Readings: Exodus 17:3-7; Romans 5: 1-2, 5-8; John 4: 5-42

Preacher: Sr. Karen Dietz

“Come see a man who told me everything I have done.” With these words, the unnamed “woman at the well” begins her ministry of evangelization. As I have pondered these words, I wonder if I would have done the same.

The woman is a Samaritan and has come for water in the heat of the day, probably because she is a Samaritan and they were considered inferior and suffered prejudice and persecution by the Jews. Also, as we learn, she was living a life of promiscuity, living with a man to whom she is not married. Coming to get water when she would most likely be alone was most likely her intent. And it is at this time of such vulnerability that she meets Jesus.

Jesus asks her for a drink. She balks at this, because why on earth would Jewish man be asking a Samaritan woman for a drink. This is breaking all the rules of Jewish dietary law. Her very wondering opens her up to the possibility that this man might want to offer her something more.

On this weekend in churches throughout the world those individuals in the RCIA process, the elect, will experience the first of three “scrutinies” in preparation to receive the Easter sacraments. The prayers of the scrutiny are prayers of examination, prompting each elect to reflect on his or her experience of God and his or her experience of sin. Like the woman at the well, Jesus asks those preparing to become full members of the Catholic Church to look back on their life and to commit themselves to following the way of the Gospel more fully and whole heartedly.

The elect, in making such a public commitment to God and to the Church, remind us all of our own sinfulness and our need for God. Though the questions and prayers of the scrutiny are specific to those preparing for entrance into the Church, I believe those prayers are meant for all. We all need to look back from time to time, see those places of sin and separation from God and ask for God’s forgiveness.

But this is so hard sometimes, isn't it? We would prefer to slip quietly to the well, unnoticed, to fill our jars and return to our lives. Often we choose to continue to live a life in sin and darkness rather than risk being vulnerable before God. This path seems easier than facing a God who can tell us everything we have ever done.

Jesus meets the woman at such a time and gently listens to her, prompts her and tells her that she is fully known. He does not condemn her or shame her or walk away. He receives her with an openness that seems to take her by surprise. He offers her "life giving water." He desires her to be more fully alive and to be completely in God. Jesus loves this woman in her sinfulness and brokenness.

I believe the same is true for us. Jesus has but one desire, to meet us in our sinfulness and brokenness and to bring us to the fullness of life. However, we have to be willing to go the well. We have to take the time to be quiet with God in prayer; to accept the invitation from Jesus and to offer a cup of water when we would prefer to run the other way.

We have to stay in the moment with Jesus as he tells us everything we have done. It will be uncomfortable and perhaps even painful as we realize when and how often we have sinned. For me, it is even more unsettling to realize that Jesus knows. We have to stay long enough to know God's love for us in spite of our failings and to know God's desire for us to be healed.

That's a long time to stay at the well and to be in Jesus' presence. If and when we do, we will understand the gift of our faith, this life-giving water that was used at our baptism and continues to wash us clean every time we fall into sin.

When we spend the time at the well, we understand what the elect are just beginning to experience, the fact that God loves us so abundantly that no sin can permanently separate us. When our sins are brought into the light, we see that they are forgiven and we know we are being given yet another opportunity to grow in faith. When we experience this love and forgiveness, of course we too will join the woman at the well in spreading the word about Jesus of Nazareth. And we will not be afraid.