

Homily for the 3rd Sunday of Lent

March 6-7, 2021

(Georgia Micoli reflects on Cycle A readings for the third Sunday of Lent for parishes with candidates and or catechumens preparing to celebrate the Easter Sacraments of Initiation. We will return to Cycle B readings next week)

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

Preacher: Georgia Micoli

In the Gospel story of the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus addresses exclusion, centered around the issue of ethnicity, religion and gender.

Marginalizing a person or group due to a difference in race, color, creed or gender is not an option to be a follower of Christ. Jesus invites everyone into the Kingdom of God.

Jesus and his disciples were traveling from Judea to Galilee, which required that they must travel through Samaria. The Jews considered the Samaritans ethnically impure after having intermarried with the Assyrians who invaded and colonized their country 700 years prior. While the Jews and the Samaritans were both Semitic people from the twelve tribes of Jacob, the Jews also believed that the Samaritans were religiously compromised since they worshipped differently and used a their own version of the Torah. Samaria was a region to pass through and not linger. The story starts with Jesus resting alone at Jacob's well.

It was noon when the women comes to the well, uncommon since women usually drew water in the early hours of the morning when it was cool. The disciples had gone in search of food when Jesus initiates the conversation asking simply for a

drink of water. He had overstepped the gender boundaries since it was scandalous to speak to a woman alone in public and they would never have shared a drinking vessel. Fully aware that Jesus was Jewish and that Jews disapproved of Samaritans, her responses to Jesus were self-assured and curt. They banter back and forth until Jesus offers “Living Water.” Living in an arid land, the thought of continually flowing water captured her full attention. She responds more respectfully and addresses Jesus as “Sir” while trying to figure a way to avoid going to the well everyday. She wanted more information but Jesus asks her to get her husband. When she discloses that she had none, Jesus affirms her answer and then references her past five husbands.

There was no way Jesus could have known that, so she assumes he must be a prophet. She was aware of the coming Messiah but unaware that centuries before the prophets had described God as Living Water. Jesus makes the connection for her. Then, magnanimously, he discloses his identity: “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.” This is the first time in John’s Gospel that he shares his identity with anyone!

At that precise moment, the disciples return with food to witness Jesus speaking to this woman. They are astonished and completely at a loss for words. The woman goes into the city to announce this discovery to her fellow Samaritans, leaving her valuable water jar behind. When the disciples offer Jesus food, he responds that his “food is to do the will of him who sent me and complete his work...But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for

harvesting.” Meanwhile in the city, the Samaritans listened to the woman’s story and went out to meet Jesus to see for themselves.

We don’t hear any more about the disciples. Were the actions of Jesus too much of a challenge? They were taught that the Samaritans were unclean. Talking to a woman and disclosing his identity left them speechless! When the Samaritans came back with the woman, they invited Jesus to stay, and he accepted. How could Jesus stay and be exposed to their impurity? Were their suppositions and long held traditions valid?

Jesus stayed in Samaria for two days before returning to Galilee. The Samaritans indeed believed Jesus was the Savior of the world. This was the harvest that Jesus disclosed to the disciples and the time was ripe! The conversation the woman had with Jesus immersed her in his mission: she had become a disciple of our Lord! Her “testimony” had brought the Samaritans to Jesus so they were now accepted into his kingdom.

This encounter illustrates how each of us is crucial in bringing about the kingdom of God no matter our gender or unwarranted presuppositions against us. Jesus made it crystal clear that bigotry was not tolerated. We cannot call ourselves Christian, followers of Christ, if we bear animosity toward any person or group of people based on gender, race, creed or ethnicity. God wants and needs us all for the harvest and as part of his kingdom!

