

Fr. Curtis Miller

March 15-16, 2020

Homily for the 3rd Sun. of Lent

I hesitate to bring it up because it's the last thing any of us wants to hear more about, but I know it's on all of our minds: the spread of the Coronavirus. I could say that we're all sick of hearing about it, but now is probably not the time for bad puns. Many of us are tempted to be afraid, and that's understandable. The unknown is always frightening.

At a times like this, we realize how short and fragile life can be. In fact, we know that we are all going to die... just probably not of this. We're taking all these extra precautions to protect those most vulnerable to sickness: the elderly and those with compromised immune systems. At this time, we're reminded to make the most of God's gift of life, not with selfish pursuits, but by being good, holy, loving, and giving of ourselves. Those are the things that make life truly worth living.

A couple weeks ago, at the start of Lent, we were reminded of our mortality when our foreheads were marked with ashes and we heard the words: "Remember that you are dust, and unto dust you shall return." But that is not the only message of Lent. Rather, Lent is about preparing to celebrate Jesus' victory over death and sin in His resurrection. It reminds us that though things are uncertain, we are in God's hands, and that's the best place we can place to be. And so we pray, "Jesus, I trust in You," not in fear, but with hope and expectant joy.

Sometimes during our journey through the desert of Lent or the desert of this current uncertainty, we can grumble against God, like our Jewish forefathers wandering through the desert. We thirst, we have needs and desires that we don't trust God will provide for, so we look for all sorts of streams from which to drink: entertainment, sports, pleasure, and power. And while these things can be good when enjoyed properly, they can never satisfy our deepest thirst. Only one spring will satisfy us: the wellspring of living water bubbling up in Jesus Himself. We can always go to Him, and drink deeply to find the satisfaction of our deepest needs and desires.

That's what Jesus tells the woman at the well in today's Gospel reading. Jesus comes to us in a direct, personal way like He did to her. He wants us to be fully honest and open with Him about our sins and weaknesses, instead of putting on a show or trying to impress Him. Why? So that He can judge us? No. So that He can heal us. Jesus already knows our sins and failings, as He did with the woman at the well, but He wants us to give Him permission to heal us, and then nourish us with His life-giving water. That woman had been longing to be loved, and she had looked many places, only to be dissatisfied. But in Jesus, she found the perfect love for which she had always longed. During our Lenten journey, may we also be open to receiving the love of Jesus.

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And now, briefly, we continue our journey through the Stations of the Cross.

The Fifth Station: Simon Helps Jesus Carry His Cross. Perhaps he began unwillingly at first. After all, Simon was forced to help carry the cross by the Roman soldiers. Perhaps he thought to himself, “Why do I have to carry the burden of this criminal,” not recognizing Jesus as the innocent Messiah. However, Simon was in fact carrying some of the weight of his own sins in the cross. When we are called upon to help carry the burdens of others, let’s not complain or grumble, but rather humbly see it carrying our fair share, grateful to Jesus for bearing the brunt of the weight.

The Sixth Station: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus. She reaches out to Jesus with love, on a day when so many others had only reached out to strike Him. Veronica is not reaching out to Jesus in His glory, but when He was at His weakest and lowest. Through all the blood and dirt, Veronica still recognized the beautiful face of the Son of God. She stood to gain nothing by her charity, yet when she took back her cloth, it was marked with an image of the face of Jesus. Whenever you and I reach out in love to the poor and the downtrodden, we too touch the face of Jesus. And He imprints His beautiful image not onto a cloth, but onto our very souls. Jesus, please give us a share of Veronica’s courage and love.