

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent- A 2008**

(Deacon Pat Hall)

Homilies are aids to encountering the living Word.

Please read the scripture passages that this homily hopes to embrace.

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

The readings can be found at: <http://www.usccb.org/nab/022408.shtml>

#### **Prior to Gospel proclamation:**

*Please rest your legs and sit.*

*Open your ears as Jesus wishes to reveal himself to you, today.*

“...for we have heard for ourselves and we know that this is truly the savior of the world.”

I was raised on the interpretation of this Gospel as characterizing the Woman-at-the-Well as a great sinner, a promiscuous woman.

She is like that person in the Country Western song of someone “looking for love in all the wrong places.”

Here’s some floozy who’s had 5 husbands and is now shacking up with a guy that she isn’t even married to.

My cop suspicion wants to know, “Where are those other 5 bodies?

Were autopsies done?”

The life lesson for me was that there was no sin I could commit that was too evil for God to forgive.

There is no longing so big that Christ could not fill it.

Just this realization alone would be enough to contemplate, in which to grow, in which to find God.

Sr. Marlene Halpin taught me to look for the meaning of scripture in layers.

There is no one interpretation, no single de-coding of God’s revealed Word.

The living Word has something to say to every individual here in each of your individual situations.

Another layer of understanding does not mean rejection of an earlier layer.

We are just being led deeper and deeper into God’s mind.

I am going to offer another perspective of the Woman-at-the-Well.

This perspective was shared with me by Dr. Schneider in a Notre Dame class on the Gospel of John.

The Gospel of John came forth from an early Christian community situated in Asia Minor, just north of Samaria and Galilee.

This community was composed of Christians of Jewish, Samaritan and Gentile backgrounds.

This was a challenging mix of people who were by tradition mutual antagonists.

It has been suggested that the Well story is a story of this early Johannine community and the woman was the representative figure for this community's faith path.

This story, telling about an individual's transgressions and transforming salvation, is a story about a people.

The Samaritans were a people of Moses who had been returned to Samaria after captivity by the Assyrians.

During their exile, their faith had been corrupted by exposure to the Assyrian polytheism.

They brought back from exile belief in the 5 Assyrian Gods. 5 husbands?

Their faith relationship in the first century was idolatrous- in Biblical language, adulterous.

Is this the man she was living with?

It is curious that Jesus is not affronted by this situation.

In fact, Jesus is quite patient and even playful in his conversation with the Woman.

There is no hint of condemnation.

Jesus knows the faith history of this people and offers himself as the living water, as the fulfillment of their messianic hopes and promise of eternal life.

Why would Jesus reprimand a people who were doing their best in seeking a relationship with their creator?

Their seeking had led them to be open to his revelation.

This was at a time when many Jews in Israel were not receptive to Jesus.

Remember the Romans, at the instigation of Jewish authorities, crucified him.

It is also interesting the role the Woman plays.

She is representing her people to Jesus.

Upon her transforming experience with the living water, she shares Jesus with her people.

Sounds like a priestly action to me.

Let's look at a generic understanding of a priest, like the ancient Jewish priests at the temple or the Aztec priests at the pyramid summit.

They made the people's needs known to their God and made God present to the people.

By virtue of our baptism, we are called to be priest, prophet and king.

We are to make the needs of our loved ones known to God.

We are to be God's presence to each other.

Just as Jesus makes God present to us in sign and sacrament at communion, we are to be sign and sacrament of Jesus to the world we live in. This is what we mean by the priesthood of believers.

Our ordained Catholic priests have responded to God's call to serve his faithful. As they have the responsibility to serve they have also received certain authority. At what work place does one have the responsibility to perform without the commensurate authority to accomplish that for which they are held responsible? So in that way, our ordained priests have the authority for presiding at Mass, administering the sacraments and leading our pilgrimage. But that does not release us from our baptismal responsibility of being priest to each other.

There are even times during the liturgy you can exercise your priestly duty. When the gifts are brought forth, I ask you to lay at the altar in your prayer the needs of your loved ones, of those for whom you are responsible and for those strangers whom God has led across your path.

This priestly responsibility was embraced by the Woman-at-the-Well who shared with Jesus her people's thirst and then ran to her people to share Christ.

Jesus had challenged her to call her husband. She had none. What she had was insufficient and a cheap imitation of what God offered her. Jesus offered himself as the one who loved totally, gave of himself totally and without condition.

This weekend during the Scrutinies, our candidates and elect ask themselves what stands between them and God as they journey towards the Easter Vigil.

During this time, may we ask ourselves what we hold that is insufficient and a cheap imitation?

At this time of Lent, let us cast off that which is in the way of the only one who can fulfill our thirst.

As we behold Christ, let us be priests to each other as the Woman-at-the-Well was to her people.

As you serve each other, remember that Jesus revealed a playful, kind and patient attitude towards the Woman.

Let God-in-the-flesh be our model.

Let us be as he revealed himself.

"...for we have heard for ourselves and we know that this is truly the savior of the world."