

Third Sunday of Lent (Year A)

March 12, 2023

In baseball as a friend described to me, a pitcher throws a changeup to the same batter three at-bats in row. The third time, the batter hits it way out of the park.

A quarterback keeps throwing the same sideline pass. Eventually, a defender picks it off and returns it for a touchdown.

A point guard tries the same no-look pass to a teammate in the corner for the final shot. The opposing player anticipates it and tips the ball away as time expires.

In each case, the announcer says “He went to the well once too often!”

Of course, what the announcer means by that is that the player kept re-visiting the same play, the same pitch, the same pass - until it no longer worked. Whatever had worked before was no longer the case. Good fortune had run out. The element of surprise had run out. The well had run dry.

As you can imagine, this phrase did not first arise in regard to sports. It comes from real life. For most of humanity (in the past and today) obtaining water is an uncertain sort of enterprise. It is not a given. Rather, it is a precious commodity, one that we all depend on for survival, so much so that, people are willing to fight and die over it.

Now, for people who live near large sources of fresh water, this might not seem like a big deal. But for most people around the world, it is. Go to some remote areas of my home diocese in Ghana. It’s a matter of life and death. Even in this country, much of the west is continually in a state of drought. Even the Colorado River no longer runs to the sea. People from a hundred years ago would not have thought that was even a possibility.

And in the Great Plains, the giant aquifers deep underground (which were once thought to contain a seemingly endless supply of water) are in danger of being used up altogether. Yes, water is precious. And water is life. And if one goes to the well once too often, the thing you wanted all along might no longer be there, no longer be available.

We just heard the story often called The Woman at the Well, one of the longest stories in the New Testament. And there is a lot going on in this story, hence the church recommends RCIA First Scrutiny on this weekend. Some of the lessons one can learn are that, Jesus alone is the Living Water that fills our void; that Jesus is not fazed by our sins; that Jesus is our Savior-King and that our life should overflow into the exaltation of the Messiah.

Indeed it has a lot of religious significance more than what can be covered in one homily. And so, I encourage you to re-visit this story in the quiet of your homes and in the quiet of your hearts, allowing our loving God to speak to you as he sees fit. I'll just touch on one aspect of the story today.

I wish we knew more about the woman. I wish we knew what sort of day she was having up to that point. I wish I knew what she was thinking about as she approached the well.

Was this day a completely ordinary day? Probably. Or maybe she was reflecting on more serious things as she journeyed there. Maybe something about her kids. Or her marriage. Or something from her past. Or some sort of issue or disagreement with extended family. Or something wonderful that had happened recently. We just don't know.

One thing seems to be pretty clear. She came to the well for one particular thing, but left with something different altogether. She came to have her thirst quenched, and wound up being refreshed in an entirely different way. She came probably expecting to encounter no one, and wound up encountering THE ONE who counts, someone who quickly made a

profound difference and impact on her life, an encounter from which she would be forever changed.

I guess not all wells work the same way. Some never run out. Ever. Do we believe that? It's sort of a two-part question. The first part is whether we think God is truly present to us, in a personal, intimate kind of way. Or do we hold an opposing view, an attitude closer to what the Israelites felt as they traveled in the desert, wondering,

“Is the Lord in our midst or not?”

If the answer is “no”, then there's absolutely no reason to go to the well. But if the answer is “yes”, then the second part of the question becomes pretty important. And it is this: Does God really WANT to give us all good things, CAN he give us every good thing, WILL he give us everything we need to make our way in this life? Or does the well eventually run dry?

Sometimes it really feels that way, doesn't it? Too many things don't go our way. Too many disappointments pile up. Too many sorrows. Too much pain. Have I asked once too many times? Is God no longer listening? Why do I keep bringing up the bucket and finding it empty, bone-dry? I guess it depends on what kind of water we think he's going to provide.

The answer to that question is important, for it shapes how we will experience this life, how well we will navigate the waters we find ourselves journeying over and through. My dear friends in Christ, what are you thirsting for? (My RCIA candidates, what are you thirsting for?) Truly. What things matter the most? What things can you really not do without? Let's use the rest of Lent contemplating those very things. And may we find ways during these forty days to go to the well often, go to the Lord Jesus with open hearts, open minds, and a thirsty soul, thereby allowing him to quench our thirst in the only way God can.

