

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On this Third Sunday of Lent, the Scriptures proclaimed speak of the gratuitous love and graciousness of God in how He relates to our human condition. In Exodus, we read of the great difficulty Moses faces in dealing with the Israelites, who have become impatient and doubt the existence of God. Their impatience and anger alarms him and so he petitions God to deliver him from his plight. In their frustration and thirst, the Jewish People, having been freed from Egyptian slavery, actually prefer to go back to that imprisonment. In their minds, at least they had enough to eat and drink. Their predicament is easy to understand. Massah and Meribah are famous geographic places because they represent how easy it can be to doubt whether God is present in times of difficulty and challenge. "Is the Lord in our midst or not?" How many times have we uttered this sentiment in thought, word, or deed?

As a priest, I have the privilege of speaking with parishioners and others who are experiencing hardships in life. In listening to their stories, I am deeply moved by their sincere desire to reconcile difficulties and challenges with God's presence in their lives. Sometimes the struggles relate to illness, family dynamics, and many times past decisions. I try and communicate God's unconditional love for them and for us, and his desire to see healed any division or break that occurs by virtue of our human nature. To see the looks of relief, gratitude and freedom on the diverse and unique faces of these privileged encounters is a profound source of grace and gratitude. St. Paul echoes this redemptive quality of God's love in his Letter to the Romans. "And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." It is easy to give in and lose heart! May we be fortified and consoled in the knowledge that God proved his love for us through the gift of His son's death for us, fragile and sinful sons and daughters.

The encounter of the Samaritan Woman and Jesus at Jacob's Well is one of the most beautiful and clear expressions of how much God desires to be in relationship to us. This Gospel reading is powerfully rich in symbolism; in many ways, Jesus shows how God greets us in the most unexpected and unconventional places and terms. In simply speaking with the Samaritan woman, Jesus was breaking social and religious norms. Yet, he didn't stop there. Imagine the gesture of the Son of God asking this broken and marginalized woman for a drink. She questioned his request and began to discover that Jesus himself is the living water. One of my favorite sentiments in Sacred Scripture is this insight from the woman: "Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep; where then can you get this living water?" This belies a deep sense of desire and longing on her part. Jesus knows this disposition of hers: "Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." Transformed and reconciled, the Samaritan Woman became a companion of Jesus and a prophetic voice; her profession of faith drew the Samaritan people to Jesus and in their encounter with him they confirmed that he was indeed the "savior of the world."

I pray and encourage each of us to take these beautiful readings to heart and to rediscover how all things are possible with God. May the Samaritan Woman at Jacob's Well be a model for us to not be afraid to encounter Jesus Christ and proclaim the Good News to those around us!!

Fr. Tom