

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank Kelly Gotelli, the St. Pius PTG Fund Raising Chair, PTG Co-Presidents Mandi Lonergan and Heather Torres and the many volunteers and donors who supported the recent school virtual auction. “No Place Like Home,” the theme of the auction, was very successful. This is indicative of the positive energy and hope we are experiencing as a parish community as life slowly “comes back to normal.” We will share the final amount raised as well as a list of the event sponsors in an upcoming bulletin.

A special welcome to Joe Martin who will be speaking today at the 9:30 am Mass. He will share insights about the SEARCH series which at this point includes fourteen participants!! I hope that his sharing of his experience encourages others to be a part of this spiritual opportunity!

Over the course of the next three Sundays, we will be celebrating the Scrutinies at the 9:30 am Mass for our Elect who will receive full initiation into the Roman Catholic Church on Holy Saturday. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops states: “The scrutinies, which are solemnly celebrated on Sundays and are reinforced by an exorcism, are rites for self-searching and repentance and have above all a spiritual purpose. The scrutinies are meant to uncover, and then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the hearts of the elect; to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good. For the scrutinies are celebrated in order to deliver the elect from the power of sin and Satan, to protect them against temptation, and to give them strength in Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. These rites, therefore, should complete the conversion of the elect and deepen their resolve to hold fast to Christ and to carry out their decision to love God above all.”

Today’s first reading from Exodus and the John’s Gospel, center around water and its life-giving dimension. In Exodus, the Israelites rebuke Moses because of their lack of water. They actually condemn him for delivering them out of Egyptian slavery! Moses turns to God who answers his plea. At Horeb, Moses strikes the rock with his staff and water flows forth in the land of Massah and Meribah. This is the place where the Israelites cried out, “Is God with us, or not?”

Saint John Chrysostom, in his *Catecheses*, writes: “What distinguishes the first Moses? *Moses*, Scripture tells us, *was more gentle than all who dwelt upon the earth*. We can rightly say the same of the new Moses, for there was with him the very Spirit of gentleness, united to him in his inmost being. In those days Moses raised his hands to heaven and brought down manna, the bread of angels; the new Moses raises his hands to heaven and gives us the food of eternal life. Moses struck the rock and brought forth streams of water; Christ touches his table, strikes the spiritual rock of the new covenant and draws forth the living water of the Spirit. This rock is like a fountain in the midst of Christ’s table, so that on all sides the flocks may draw near to this living spring and refresh themselves in the waters of salvation.

Since this fountain, this source of life, this table surrounds us with untold blessings and fills us with the gifts of the Spirit, let us approach it with sincerity of heart and purity of conscience to receive grace and mercy in our time of need. Grace and mercy be yours from the only-begotten Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; through him and with him be glory, honor and power to the Father and the life-giving Spirit, now and always and for ever. Amen.”

The story of the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well is one of my favorite passages and has been since I was in high school. The scenario in which Jesus meets this woman is replete with very powerful imagery. As a Samaritan, this woman would have been a foreigner and the Jewish people were quite antagonistic towards them. To exchange anything with a Samaritan would connote defilement or uncleanness. In sum, the Samaritans were outcasts. Add to this the fact that Jesus, the Messiah, was speaking to a Samaritan woman alone! This would have been cause for great scandal. Yet, this is precisely the point Jesus is making in engaging her in a transformative and life-changing encounter. Salvation is open to all people, even those who have been deemed to be outcast or marginalized for any reason. One of the most powerful statements the woman makes, *You have no bucket, sir, and the well is deep: how could you get this living water*, connotes her longing. There is a sense of weariness but also hope. This Gospel is so well situated within the context of our Lenten experience. It reorients us towards the life-giving water only Christ can give to us. A relationship with Jesus satisfies our thirst and hungry hearts and heals the alienation we sometimes experience in life. God's grace and Spirit is always available to us. We simply need to ask and Jesus will answer us.

St. Augustine offers an excellent reflection on the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. "He asks for a drink, and he promises a drink. He is in need, as one hoping to receive, yet he is rich, as one about to satisfy the thirst of others. He says, *If you knew the gift of God*. The gift of God is the Holy Spirit. But he is still using veiled language as he speaks to the woman and gradually enters into her heart. Or is he already teaching her? What could be more gentle and kind than the encouragement he gives? *If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' perhaps you might ask and he would give you living water.*

What is this water that he will give if not the water spoken of in Scripture: *With you is the fountain of life? How can those feel thirst who will drink deeply from the abundance in your house? He was promising the Holy Spirit in satisfying abundance. She did not yet understand. In her failure to grasp his meaning, what was her reply? The woman says to him: Master, give me this drink, so that I may feel no thirst or come here to draw water.* Her need forced her to this labor, her weakness shrank from it. If only she could hear those words: *Come to me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you.* Jesus was saying this to her, so that her labors might be at an end; but she was not yet able to understand."

May we continue to accompany one another along this sacred time of Lent. I invite you to take advantage of the many spiritual growth opportunities we are offering here at St. Pius!

Fr. Tom