

Third Sunday of Lent 2020

My beloved brothers and sisters, before we can understand the deeper meaning of this Gospel, which we have heard so many times, we need to place the gospel story in its cultural and historical setting: Jews hated the Samaritans and visa versa. They would literally go a long way out of their way travelling from the northern Galilee to Jerusalem, to avoid going through Samaria at the southern end of the lake of Galilee. Secondly, in the culture of the Mediterranean world at the time of Jesus, women had their place and men had their place. Women would go to the well in the early morning, and late at night. Men would go during the day to avoid the impropriety of meeting a woman who was not their wife in public. Thirdly, women would never go to the Agora, the public market for the same reason. Fourthly, neither women nor men would engage in conversation in public. Fifthly, Jesus was considered a Rabbi, and His behavior would have been utterly scandalous. Sixth, she was carrying a huge water jar on her head a long distance from her town, when there was a perfectly good well in her town. Seventh, a woman would never have argued theology with a man. Eighth, she was obviously ostracized by her own village, because she was a brazen hussy. And finally, the woman had an astonishing and rapid insight into who Jesus really is: "Judean [a scornfully pronounced identification]," "sir" "prophet," and "Messiah," leading ultimately to the village's recognition of Jesus as "Savior of the world."

Jesus was tired and thirsty, but He was more thirsty and hungry for this woman's soul; and, His tiredness does not hold back from His loving a discarded soul, rejected by her own community, for a lost sheep that crosses His path. He sees into her soul, and sees in her the darkness that comes from her unstable and sinful life. He sees that her suffering heart provides an opportunity for grace and conversion, and forgetting His own needs, He coaches her along into conversion! This is the first teaching of the Gospel: Jesus does not avoid us because we are sinners; He does not avoid us because of the shame we often carry with us in our lives; rather, He has come to lift us out of shame and back into the Light of His infinite Divine Mercy for us!

Like the parable of the Lost Sheep, Jesus has come to fetch us out of the grasp of our sinfulness and shame, and bring us into communion with Himself. This is the whole meaning of His coming as man, and the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Confession and Holy Eucharist. The Sacrament of Confession is not the Sacrament of shame, it is the Sacrament by which we encounter the Infinite Divine Mercy and Love of God in Jesus, and by which He lifts us into communion with Himself!

Then the Gospel tells us that having experienced a profound conversion, she rushes off to share the Good News with others in the village. Jesus teaches us the way we bring others to conversion is not through sophisticated theological arguments, but by personal witness of what Jesus has done for us!

Finally, the Apostles come back and are utterly shocked at the scene. They still do not understand that the call of God in Jesus is the call of God for everyone to enter into the Infinite Divine Mercy of God and His Divine Life. That is why He came. On the twenty third of this month we will have our Penance Service in preparation for Easter, come, let the Divine Shepherd heal you. This is the best way to be prepared and ready for whenever God calls us, and whatever dangers life may have for us!