

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent (A)  
St. Athanasius and St. Francis  
March 18, 19, 2017

In the age of Twitter, and its required 140 character Tweets, and all of which I know nothing about, we get a gospel account of a real conversation. And what an amazing conversation it is.

It is amazing in so many ways and on many different levels:

- it takes place at Jacob's Well, one of the most revered sites of Israelite history and religion. Jacob purchased this land in Shekham .... it was later called Sychar as we hear in today's gospel .... on which was this well. Jacob is dated back to the very earliest days of Israelite history; he is the twin of Esau (Jacob and Esau), who are grandsons of Abraham and Sarai.
- the conversation takes place between a man and a woman and in public .... which in those days could easily have been understood as a 'come-on'
- and it is between a Jew and a Samaritan ..... a Jewish man and a Samaritan woman

As it is given to us, the entire scene says, “pay attention to this – this is very important.” The Church always uses this story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman on the Third Sunday of Lent because it has such clear baptismal significance.

Coming to a well was a very common thing to do. It was a necessary thing to do. Everyone had to come to draw water for the day. It was the Legacys/Bucketz of their day. At the well you would get water, of course, but you could meet people, and do some small business with the others who were there. But most people went to the well either in the morning or in the evening hours. You would try to avoid the heat of the day ....

unless, of course, you purposely wanted to avoid others for whatever reason. The woman in today's story may have had her reasons. Note that she has no name .... she is only 'a Samaritan woman'.

While the Church uses this story as a preliminary instruction for those anticipating baptism at Easter, I see the story with very important teaching for discipleship. If I have gone heavy, or even over-weighted a particular topic during my time here, it may well be the topic and theme of discipleship. And along with that theme, also the topics of stewardship and evangelization. I feel that these are as important to life in the Church today as water was to the people who came to the well in Jacob's day and in the time of Jesus and the Samaritan woman, and it is also important to us today.

I wonder how long the conversation between Jesus and the woman lasted. It just seems that it was indeed a real conversation. It was not simply a 'bump into someone at the well' short conversation. You don't get into one's marriage situation and one's religious

practice status after 3-5 minutes. But notice how the conversation starts. Jesus initiates the conversation by a simple statement, and rather appropriate for the situation. "Give me a drink". They were at a well, and it was not out of place for a man to expect that a woman might draw water for him. She is somewhat courageous in that she expresses her surprise, rather than simply drawing the water. All this leads to deeper conversation about water, water that will last longer than simply water from any well. Then it moves to her personal life situation and her worship life. The conversation ends when the woman is so taken and enthused by what they have talked about, and what she is beginning to suspect about this man Jesus, that she leaves and runs back to her village to tell others. The story ends with them coming to Jesus, and becoming enthused themselves. And they do it not simply because the woman was, but because they themselves are excited about this man Jesus. Yet, they were led to this by the woman's telling of her experience with Jesus.

I reported a few weeks ago when I "Thought Out Loud" with you, that this year we have no one in the RCIA process. That is for a few reasons, but certainly one of them is that by last fall no one had been brought forward who may be seeking to become part of the Catholic church. Bringing people forward is not the work of a particular staff person ... it is really the work of a parish. A parish must be as inquisitive about Jesus as the woman at the well, and a parish must be as willing to report its personal experience with Jesus like the woman did by going back to her community. When a parish has no one in the seeking mode, there is no growth. But this happens only when the parish itself shares its own experience with Jesus. People seek Jesus when they hear others talk about Jesus. And no one seeks Jesus when they do not hear about Jesus from others.

This is evangelization. This is discipleship. This is real stewardship. Stewardship is the gift of time, talent, and treasure ... but with the understanding that the greatest gift we can ever give to others is our own witness to Jesus. When others see this, they become curious, and they might begin their own search. When something is not happening in a parish, the real question should not be "why isn't someone doing something about it?", but rather "why am I not doing something about it?". At the end of each Mass we are sent ... we are sent to share the message and the very life of Jesus with others. The woman could have kept the new life she received from Jesus to herself. If she had, then those interested in Jesus would have increased by only one. But she returns to her village, to those she knew, and maybe to some she did not know so well, and tells them of the one she met at Jacob's well. It is that easy; it is also that risky. But Jesus risked his life for us ... actually he gave his life for us. What is the response that we will give?

In your small groups this Lent, practice how to share Jesus with others. If you find what you have here in this Mass, in this parish, valuable, how can you keep it to yourself all week?

