

**3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent. Readings (Year A): Exodus 17:3-7, Romans 5:1-2,5-8 & John 4: 5-42**  
**Theme: GOD ALWAYS LOVES US UNCONDITIONALLY**

Today we celebrate the First Scrutiny which falls on this Third Sunday of Lent. As I announced a couple of weeks ago, because of our candidates in the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults class (OCIA), our Bible readings for the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> Sundays will be taken from Year A, and not Year C.

At the end of the homily today, Mary Hendricks and Brenda Albright, the coordinators of our Parish OCIA will invite the candidates ( Dawn Elliot, Tammy and Brogan Malcolm) and their godparents to come forward for the Rite of Handing On of the Creed which is done during the celebration of the First Scrutiny. The Order of Christian Initiation of Adults explains the rationale behind the Scrutiny in these beautiful words: “The purpose of the Scrutinies, which are brought to completion with the help of the Exorcisms, is mainly spiritual. For the Scrutinies are ordered toward liberation from sin and the Devil, and they give strength in Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life of the elect” (p.104, # 141).

Throughout Sacred Scripture, we read of the unconditional love God has for his people. This Third Sunday of Lent’s readings also remind us of this undivided love God always has for us.

Despite the ingratitude and the grumbling of the ancient Israelites in the desert, God still provided them with water for their thirst. One may wonder how these ancient Israelites soon forget God’s unconditional love and care for them. For example, God heard their cry during their slavery in Egypt and directed Moses to lead them to the Promised Land he has promised them. Under the leadership of Moses, God successfully led them to cross the Red Sea into the desert, heading to Canaan, the Promised Land. When they met with lack of drinking water, they should have turned to God who has brought them to this far for drinking water. Rather, they attacked Moses. Fellow parishioners, in spite of their ingratitude, God did not write them off. Yes, that is God, not human beings like us. God always provided them with drinking water and all their needs. When you are going through difficult times, please remember that the God, who has brought you to this far, will certainly help you through it. He will not abandon you.

In the second reading, St. Paul also calls our attention to this unconditional love of God. He says, God provided an extraordinary love for us by giving us his only beloved Son, Jesus Christ, and allowed him to die for us sinners for our redemption/salvation.

The Gospel reading today tells how Jesus like his heavenly Father reaches out with unconditional love to the Samaritan woman at the Jacob’s well. When Jesus asked her for a water to drink, she misunderstood him. Her response to Jesus’ request was literally referring to their strained relationship between Jews and Samaritans.

Let me briefly explain this strained relationship she referred to. During the time of Jesus, the Jews and Samaritans were great enemies. Who were these Samaritans? As the name implies, they were people living in Samaria, the capital city of the ten northern tribes. Samaritans claimed Moses had originally intended the center of worship must be in the Temple on Mount Gerizim, not in Jerusalem. They were also known as Israel. The remaining two tribes in the South, namely Benjamin and Judah, purported Jerusalem as their capital city. For them, the temple in Jerusalem is the true worship center Moses intended and not Mount Gerizim as the Samaritans claimed. They were known as Judah. They deemed themselves to be ‘Pure Jews’ since they adhered strictly to the Laws of Moses and there were no mixed marriages with other nations. They considered Samaritans as ‘half-breeds’ since they had interactions with other nations.

Hope this brief explanation helps you to understand the question the Samaritan woman posed to Jesus: “How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for drinking water?” Fellow parishioners, Jesus Christ treated her with the same love and care he would have given to his biological family. Jesus did not condemn her for having had five husbands. Jesus was aware that she is a wounded woman, wounded by a series of broken relationships. She became an outcast, an adulteress, a public sinner, and was not welcome among her own people. She herself was aware of these painful public views of her that is why she went to fetch water in the afternoon. Normally, they fetch water in the morning to avoid the heat of the scorching sun in the afternoon. What she needs is love and respect, not condemnation and rejection. Jesus reached out to her with his unconditional love and respect which broke the barriers of prejudice and hostility to bring her the good news of salvation. This woman never experienced this true love and respect prior to meeting Jesus. No wonder she totally believed Jesus is the true Messiah. Hence, she became a missionary of Jesus and his Good News of salvation. She became the first missionary of Jesus and introduced Jesus and his Good News to her people. Yes, it is true, the “rejected stone” has become the “cornerstone.” Great and awesome is our God. St. John tells us “Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me everything I have done.” The Gospel of John says, “Many more began to believe in him because of his word, and they said to the woman, ‘We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the World.’” Yes through her, they now have their personal faith in Jesus. In short, the Samaritans believe first on the basis of the word of the woman who testified about Jesus and then on the basis of their own experience of Jesus’ words.

My dear people of God, many people today are also thirsting for Jesus, the Living Water. Like the Samaritan woman, are you willing and ready to introduce Jesus to them? Many people are thirsty for true love, peace, acceptance, respect, name them, which can only be found in Jesus.

During this Season of Lent, let us try to find out what it is that prevents us from inviting Jesus into our lives. As we all know very well, once you have Jesus Christ, you have all in all. Someone put it so beautifully, “Give me Jesus and take the whole world.”

May Holy Mother Mary and her beloved husband, St. Joseph, whose solemnity we celebrated this past Wednesday, continue to pray for us to experience Jesus Christ, the true Living Water. Amen

