

3rd Sunday of Lent “A Remedy for Spiritual Exhaustion”

Bishop Frank Schuster

When I think of biblical people who hunger and thirst, a people who are spiritually exhausted, I think of God’s people being led through the desert to the Promised Land. During that long journey, they often became hungry and thirsty. When they voiced their hunger to God, the Lord gave them bread from heaven. When they voiced their thirst to God, the Lord gave them life- giving water from what was a lifeless rock. When you jump ahead to John chapter 6, we find how important the exodus story is to the Beloved Disciple.

I believe we are all like the Hebrews traveling in the desert to the Promised Land. We are all traveling with Christ’s Church, over the sands of space and time, to the promised land of the Kingdom of Heaven. Like the Hebrews, there were generations before us and there very well may be generations ahead of us. We are a people on a journey of faith to the everlasting life God has promised us. On this journey, we too get hungry. We too get thirsty. Like the Hebrews, God has given us bread from heaven in the Eucharist to nourish our souls for the next leg of the journey. Like the Hebrews, God has given us the life giving water to quench our spiritual thirst. We remember our baptism every time we enter the Church, dipping our finger in holy water and making the sign of the cross. We have physical hungers and thirsts that need attending to every day. We also have spiritual hungers and thirsts that must be attended to lest we fall on our face in exhaustion in the spirit life. Jesus Christ meets such a soul at the well in Samaria.

Can you imagine a human being more alienated or alone than this woman at the well? Notice that she doesn’t even have a name! Perhaps the evangelist is inviting us to see ourselves in this woman for a moment or perhaps she is so isolated and alone that she doesn’t even have a name. We know that she is a Samaritan. Samaritans were considered to be outcasts by Jesus’ people, the Jews of his day. Samaritans were considered to be apostates, heretics, and despised by God. No good Jew of Jesus’ day would ever have a conversation with a Samaritan. And Samaritans felt the same way about Jews. And notice the violence there! The violence of bigotry and the violence of religious intolerance! My friends, please understand that this woman, at the outset of the story, is a victim of violence.

Secondly, men never approached or talked with women alone in Jesus’ day. This would have been understood to be disrespectful of the woman’s family. Indeed, there are many places in the world where this kind of violence manifests itself. And yes, it is violence. There is violence at times between the sexes, between men and women, that is greater in some cultures than in others, that is present even in some of our homes in Federal Way that causes division and fear.

Thirdly, this woman was alone. Women never went to the well alone. They went in groups in the morning because going to the well was a social time and it was cool in the morning. The Gospel says the woman was at the well at noon time, the hottest time

during the day in Samaria, 100 degrees or better probably. And there is violence there, the violence of alienation from her own family and from her own people. The woman was at the well alone at the worst time of the day, why?

This woman was an outcast. This woman was suffering from the violence of her own sinfulness and the violence of other people's sinful behavior towards her. She was a victim of the violence of sin. My friends, I can't think of anyone more alienated or alone than this woman at the well. Can you? Can you imagine anyone more spiritually hungry or thirsty than this woman?

What does Jesus do? Does Jesus allow religion to block his way to healing this woman? No. Does Jesus allow sexism to block his way? No. Does Jesus allow alienation to block his way? No. Does Jesus allow even the evil of sin to block his way? No.

Christians, look at every wall that was standing between Jesus and this woman at the beginning of this story! And these were very big walls, some that took a lifetime to build, others that took centuries of intolerance to construct. Look how Jesus walks through every wall within seconds. Crash, Boom, Bang. Violence healed through non-violence. Sin healed through forgiveness. Alienation, conflict, sinfulness and hurt that took years to cultivate were destroyed in minutes through the power of God's all-powerful love in the Gospel today.

At the end of the story, notice how the woman leaves her bucket behind at the well. Why? Because she found life giving water! A hungry soul was fed. A soul's thirst was quenched. At the end of the story, the once alienated woman becomes an evangelist at the heart of a believing community, leading people to Christ.

She has no name, but then perhaps again that is an invitation to see how our lives are like that woman at the well. What walls have we constructed between Jesus and ourselves? In what ways have we participated in a culture of death towards others or towards ourselves? Are we willing to have a conversation with Christ at the well of our hearts?

My friends, we have followed Jesus into the desert this Lent to fast and pray. Our physical thirst and hunger remind us of our spiritual hunger and thirst. In moments of spiritual exhaustion, we are reminded of the waters of our baptism and hunger to encounter God in the Eucharist. We have food and drink that the world does not know.