

3rd Sunday of Lent - A
Exodus 17:3-7;
Romans 5:1-2; 5-8;
John 4:5-42
Little Flower - 3/15/20

My Brothers and Sisters,

One of my first courses in Rome was Christian Revelation taught by Fr. René Latourelle. In this course, Fr. Latourelle identified ten specific qualities of Christian Revelation. One of them is the superabundance of God's love for us. God not only loves us, but he loves us superabundantly. As St. John wrote, "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life*" [Jn. 3:16]. Today's second reading echoes this theme: "*Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person, though perhaps for a good person one might even find courage to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.*"

Fr. Edward Schillebeeckx wrote a book titled *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*. There probably is no story in the Gospels that better exemplifies Christ as the sacrament of the encounter with God than the story of the Samaritan woman at the well.

Jesus' encounter with the woman was dramatic, intimate, and life changing. First, it was dramatic. Jesus asked the woman for water, seemingly a simple request. The woman was surprised that Jesus asked her for water since "*Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.*" Even less would Jewish men talk with Samaritan women. When his disciples returned, they were amazed that he was talking with a woman.

Second, the encounter was intimate. Jesus revealed God to her and revealed her to herself. He revealed himself as the Messiah, the Christ, the gift of God, the giver of life-giving water rising up to eternal life. At the same time, Jesus revealed the woman to herself when he talked with her about her multiple marriages.

Third, because Jesus spoke heart to heart to the woman at the well, the encounter was life changing for her. Her encounter with Jesus brought her to conversion of heart. We have to believe that from that day forward she believed in Jesus. We have to believe that from that day forward she worshiped God in spirit and in truth. Finally, we know from the story that she shared the Good News of Jesus with others.

My brothers and sisters, at this point our Lenten penance service is still scheduled for this Thursday at 7:00 p.m. In the sacrament of reconciliation, we are invited to encounter the dramatic, intimate, life-changing love of Christ as the Samaritan woman did in the Gospel. We are invited to experience the healing, forgiving love of Christ who proved God's love for us by dying for us while we were still sinners.

In recent years, the sacrament of reconciliation has become the forgotten sacrament. There are probably a number of reasons for this. Some of us may have a diminished awareness of the reality of sin in our lives. Sometimes we might not even know for sure what is right or wrong. Some of us may find it too difficult or too painful to admit either our sinfulness or our sins. Some of us may have lost a sense of the importance of the sacraments in our lives. Some of us may even have lost a sense of the importance of the Church in our relationship with God.

Although it is always difficult to acknowledge our sinfulness and our sins, Jesus did not give us the sacrament of reconciliation to be a burden but a gift. Jesus gave us the sacrament of reconciliation to enable us to experience humanly his forgiving, healing, reconciling love as the woman at the well experienced his love. Sometimes people say that the Catholic Church is not personal enough. The sacrament of reconciliation is the most personal of the seven sacraments. Therefore, my hope is that we will be able to celebrate this most personal sacrament with you this Thursday evening at 7:00 p.m. If anything changes, we will send out an email and put include it on our telephone greeting.