

3<sup>rd</sup> Sun. Lent

+ During my stay in the Holy Land I visited the church of St. Photina, built in the year 380, which is about a 2 hour drive north of Jerusalem. St. Photina lived at the same time as our Lord. In fact, she's the woman we hear about in the Gospel, she's the woman at the well. I mention the church named after her because if you go into the crypt of that church, the basement, you'll find a functioning, hand cranked well. The same well that our Lord visited in order to speak with the Samaritan woman. But what's really special, we were able lower the pail down the well, bring it back up with water and drink it. It was incredibly pure and refreshing. But no mention is made in the Gospel passage of our Lord, nor of the woman, actually drinking from it. And that's the point.

Of course, it was the desire for water that led the woman to the well. And it was our Lord's desire for the woman's desire that led him to the well. Initially though, the woman did not desire Christ. Her whole focus was physical refreshment, a tireless and unending desire. She comes day after day to this well...drinks, but is thirsty again and has to come back. This is symbolic of our concupiscent desire, our attempt to satisfy our longing for God by things other than God. We inherit this condition from Adam and Eve. Trying to find fulfilment in worldly goods; and although they're legitimate goods, because they can never fully satisfy us, we end up gorging on them...thinking, if I just have a little more, then I'll be content and happy.

This leads to degrees of addiction, or at least a disordered desire. Disordered when a lesser good is made out to be greater than it truly is, used or enjoyed in the wrong way. Or an addiction when a lesser good is over used and one loses their freedom to it. In the case of the Samaritan woman, her repeated return to the well is symbolic of her search for happiness in what marriage offers. The problem is that she's trying to enjoy the goods of marriage without being

married. Her unfulfillment is demonstrated by the fact that she's been married 5 times and is now with a 6<sup>th</sup> man. But it's here that the cycle of sin stops. Jesus is the 7<sup>th</sup> man in her life. Seven is symbolic of perfection and rest.

In meeting Jesus she finds true love, the love of God which does fulfill. It offers peace and real happiness. It's by coming in contact with Christ and receiving the waters of eternal life that her desire is perfected. It's no longer disordered but ordered towards fulfillment. This is what happens when we direct our lives to God and live in union with Christ. We're still human, and so we still have the same desires, but they're no longer disordered. They're perfected because they're now rightly ordered. God satisfies the deepest longing of our hearts in a way none of the other things could, as much as we tried. We no longer look to them for fulfillment once we've received it from Christ.

I mentioned that John doesn't say anything about the woman drinking from the well after she encounters Jesus. Instead he says, "The woman left her jar and went into the town." She left lying there what she had come to the well for, as if it were forgotten. She no longer has a desire for earthly water, symbolic of her sins which were disordered desires...they've been rightly ordered and perfected by Christ. She now drinks from the waters of life, true refreshment; and as a result even her earthly life is made new. Her experience calls us to question ourselves, what well have we been constantly returning to, what water have we been drinking despite it never quenching our thirst?

Just as our Lord desired to satisfy the thirst of the woman, he desires to satisfy us. His desire is for us to desire Him. That is what God wills because He wills our happiness and only He can provide it. When we receive what Christ offers us we're no longer thirsty for what's sinful, and like the woman, we leave the old water jug on the ground and walk away. The woman

at the well is an image of the confessional where one is honest with the Lord who already knows our sins, but in that encounter we receive the healing mercy and the fulfilling love of God. It's by the act of confessing our sins that we're sufficiently disenchanted by them, and we leave them there as we walk out of the confessional. Now with our desires rightly ordered, we're set to enjoy the true fulfillment that comes with our renewed life.