

Third Sunday of Lent  
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The story of the woman at the well, to me, is one of the most poignant and powerful stories in the Gospels. It is also one of the longest recorded conversations Jesus has with anyone. Mother Teresa was fond of saying, “we are made to love and be loved.” This conversation at the well beautifully portrays God’s abundant love for us as well as God’s longing for us to return that love.

By the way, an interesting piece of trivia I picked up in my research...the woman’s name is Photine or Photini, which means “the luminous one”...the one full of light.. In the Eastern Orthodox Catholic church she is venerated as a saint and is celebrated February 26<sup>th</sup>. I am not sure why her name is not used...perhaps making her nameless further signifies her lowly stature in society or, as one accounting has it, she was baptized some time after this story. She best emphasizes apostleship and was later considered one of the apostles. She is one of the patrons for woman’s ordination... a very significant woman!

One meditation book that I have found helpful for Lent, by Fr Mark Troup, provides a spiritual scenario of how a woman is transformed- reminding us of last week’s gospel and how the apostles were able to see the transformed face of God in Jesus. He highlights each phase of the movement of their conversation.

I have broken it down to 3 phases. The first is **PURSUE and HIDE**. So we have Jesus waiting at the well, stopping for a little respite and going through Samaria, which was not a direct route in their travels. But Jesus had a purpose. He is WAITING...just as He is always waiting for each of us. He pursues us in this way, not because we are worthy, but because Abba-God’s love for us is so great. God pursues us even in the places we do not feel worthy or lovable, and we just want to hide. **Photine was hiding**. Most people went to the well in the early morning and evening to avoid the heat. Photine goes at noon to be alone, to not be seen by anyone. When we believe we are less than stellar in our own lives we may tend to shy away from God. So we hide. There are times when we may try to over compensate or try to reach some spiritual achievement, hoping if we get our lives back together, God will love us. Sound familiar? I know when I do something I am not proud of, it takes me longer to get to prayer...any excuse will work because I don’t want to go there...I don’t want to be exposed. Brothers and Sisters...we are ALL Photine.

The second phase is **SEARCH and THIRST**. Photine was searching for something in her life to fill a void, to make her feel better if only for a short time. It is speculated that her promiscuity was her “quick fix” for her pain. I challenge us today...where in our lives do we ache? It might be something from the past or something we are dealing with currently. What do we use to fill that void? To make us feel better? In the book titled THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT there is a conversation between the President and his advisor. The advisor says, “The people want leadership, they are so thirsty for it...they crawl through the desert towards a mirage...and when they discover there is no water, they will drink the sand.” The President responds, “people don’t drink the sand because they are thirsty, they drink the sand because they don’t know the difference.” Photine did not know the difference...and drank the sand of promiscuity to ease the pain of what her life had become. By clinging to our human thirsts, control, possessions, status, we, too, drink the sand. When Jesus tells the woman she does not have a husband, He was gently telling her she did not need this false thirst. What are our own mirages that we seek and espouse?

The last phase is **PERSON and HOPE**. The Samaritan woman was actually quite brave, I think. She was upfront with Jesus and actually had many questions for him... ..”How can you ask me for a drink?” “Are you greater than our father Jacob?”, “Where is your jug to draw water?” Jesus gently moves her from the literal to the spiritual meaning with his answers: “I am the living water” “I am the Messiah”. In his book titled, I THIRST, 40 DAYS WITH MOTHER TERESA, Joseph Langford speaks of the very human response by the woman.”I know the Messiah is coming and He will show us all things” and when Jesus says “I am HE” she responds as if to say I have heard about the truth and what you say: maybe someday when things are better, when life is less complicated, when the Messiah does come, I will do something about this. Later. There is no need to wait for a better time or set of conditions. Jesus is present NOW to teach us how to satiate our thirst with living water. And then, FINALLY there is the moment of grace in Photine’s heart. She puts down her water jug...she no longer needs her false thirsts, her previous means of seeking love and acceptance. She has been exposed, feels the acceptance and love...a personal relationship is being formed. Jesus has led her to an understanding, “I am the one to fill that void”. She is so freed and she goes RUNNING back to her village with excitement and hope to share her news.. AND she comes out of hiding ...she is no longer worried people will know her sin because she has felt known and loved. And, by the way, this would make her the first recorded woman preacher... she shared the good news of the word of God with the villagers. And they believed her.

Jesus **pursued** her, brought her out of **hiding, revealed** her thirst, and gave her **hope**. Love and relationship opened her to be transformed. She cannot NOT spread the good news.

As I re-read this passage several times, I could feel the excitement she must have felt ...and was even feeling a little envious of her new found freedom from what has kept her down for so long and the new relationship that gave her so much happiness. We are all Photine... and these gifts are there for each of us as well. This Lent...let us take the time to spend a few moments at that well, let us have the courage to allow God to point out our "5 husbands", our false thirsts that we, like Photine, may leave those water jugs behind. And like Mother Teresa, fill the well of our hearts with the life giving water of Jesus's love.

The entire experience of Lent is leading us to the cross where Jesus will show us the full extent of His pursuit of us. On Good Friday we will hear Jesus say, "I thirst". Be not afraid. Jesus is pursuing you.

Stop. Slow down. Be still. Let Him find you.

And may we all be blessed by Abba who is our creator, by Jesus, who is our redeemer, and by the Spirit who is our sanctifier. AMEN