Homily: 3rd Sunday of Lent (yr. B, but using A readings)

Obviously, water sustains life. Life, at least according to the science and physics we know on planet Earth, needs water before anything else. When NASA finds new planets, they immediately begin looking for water. If water is present, life is also possible, at least in some form. Water is a predominant symbol in our readings. GOD Saves the Israelites traveling through a dry desert by bringing forth water from the rock at Horeb. At Jacob’s well, JESUS Promises the Samaritan woman water that will be a fountain of Eternal Life. Water was used by the Jewish Community in various ceremonies that symbolized cleansing and purification, and eventually was used by the Christian Community in Baptism. As Christians, we say the waters of Baptism wash away our sins; it first washes away Original Sin and then any sins we have personally committed. In revealing HIMSELF as the MESSIAH to the Samaritan woman, JESUS speaks to her of the fountain of water HE will give - the life-giving waters of Baptism. Even in the early days of Christianity, the Samaritan woman became a popular image for those joining the Church. They were learning to be Christians and preparing for Baptism at the Easter Vigil. They too, would soon meet JESUS at a well. Water would also play an important part in that meeting. Their lives too would be transformed forever. From Jacob’s well springs forth the living water of the MESSIAH WHO is CHRIST and LORD. Why is this so important for us during Lent? Because during Lent; our prayer, fasting and almsgiving is all about deepening the promises we made, or our parents made for us, right before we were Baptized; to love and serve GOD, to reject and renounce sin. The Samaritan woman is; for the evangelist John; a model of the experience of Faith. In a personal encounter with JESUS, she confronts the sinfulness of her people and their need for forgiveness. As I’ve told you before, for most scholars, she wasn’t literally married five times; but at five different times in their history, the Samaritan people had compromised what had been their Jewish Faith with pagan customs and practices. For this reason, they were considered worse than pagans, by the Jewish Community. In this personal encounter, the Samaritan Woman is gradually brought to faith in JESUS. If you noticed, at first, she is appalled that JESUS is even speaking to her. How can YOU, a Jew, ask me, for a drink? She then moves into calling HIM; SIR. SIR, where can you get this living water? When JESUS confronts her with the sin of the Samaritan people, she responds I can see that YOU are a prophet. When JESUS Proclaims HIMSELF the MESSIAH; I AM HE, the ONE who is speaking with you; she is so taken aback that she leaves her water jar and begins to Evangelize her fellow Samaritans; come see a man who told me everything I have done. Could HE possibly be the CHRIST? Her life is quite literally transformed and she is now a missionary. Abandoning her water jar at the well, the Samaritan woman was leaving behind her former self for a new way of life. Proclaiming to her people that she had found the Messiah was the missionary work of a new disciple. At Jacob’s well, JESUS tears down walls and breaks down barriers that divide people from one another and from GOD. HE promises water that removes the sin that separates the Samaritans from their neighbors; HE promises water that will remove all sin from every people and nation. HE comes to lead all people to worship in Spirit and truth, removing the barrier that separates the woman and her people from the community of Israel; removing the barrier that separates all peoples and nations. The Samaritan Woman is quite literally on fire. She can’t contain her desire to share with her neighbors the Messiah she has met. By sharing the Good News with her fellow Samaritans, she becomes an agent of reconciliation within her own community. Like her, we are also called to be agents of reconciliation; reaching out to one another and calling forth from one another the good each one of us possesses. In so many ordinary ways we have the opportunity to bring forth the new life and hope of Christ as we tear down any and all walls that divide us, building bridges over any and all obstacles of mistrust and hurt. Like the Samaritan Woman, we proclaim and preach CHRIST to others because we have discovered HIM in ourselves, especially as we make deeper and greater efforts at prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Sin, unfortunately, will always be a reality in our lives; but as the Samaritan woman discovered, through CHRIST, forgiveness, reconciliation, and transformation are just as real and possible. According to some writers, the Samaritan woman meeting JESUS at Jacob’s well is the Season of Lent in a nutshell. The woman comes to the well for her daily chore of getting water, she meets JESUS WHO confronts her about the direction of her life -her Ash Wednesday. JESUS then asks her for a drink of water. She hesitates; but then HE offers her something. If you knew the Gift of GOD and WHO is asking you for a drink, you would’ve asked HIM and HE would’ve given you Living water....the water of life - Baptism. Reluctantly, she admits her sins of infidelity, her people’s sins of embracing pagan practices five different times. She goes to confession. She is absolved, and the focus of her life is changed - again; she is transformed - she leaves her water jar, her former way of life behind, she joyfully proclaims that the promised MESSIAH has come - her Easter Sunday. If I haven’t already told you, Lent means green or new life. Lent has been called the Springtime of the soul. The Samaritan woman offers us an example of a fruitful Lent, of a renewed spiritual life. As she made her way to the well, JESUS was already there. Spiritual writers call that the primacy of grace. As JESUS said elsewhere in the Gospel of John; it was not you who chose ME; it was I who chose you. So, before she even knows what’s happening, she’s been found. Commenting on this Gospel, St. Augustine wrote, the woman could not thirst for GOD unless GOD was already thirsting for her faith. So, our main question during Lent is not how do I seek GOD? But how do I allow myself to be found by HIM? What obstacles are in my life that prevent me from seeing the GOD WHO is always searching for me? And like the Samaritan Woman who left her water jar at the well, what am I being called to leave there? How am I being called this Lent, to be an Agent of Reconciliation?