

Commentary to the 3rd Sunday of Lent (A)

The Hope His Forgiveness Provides



The long gospel of the woman at the well, the fourth chapter of John, is a wonderful drama of sin and forgiveness. On Monday of last week we had a reading from the Book of Deuteronomy which spoke about how the people who sinned were shamefaced. That must have been how the woman looked. At least she certainly must have felt ashamed of herself. All Jesus had to do was mention her current living arrangements, that she was living with someone who was not her husband and then the five husbands she had already had, and she was aware of her sinful life. She felt dead inside. That is what sin does to us. It makes us feel like we are dead. But Jesus had promised her living water. She received it. She received forgiveness. And she went into town exuberant, full of life, full of love and full of hope.

This hope exists for us too. We have the hope that despite our sins, God's compassion and mercy has restored us to life with him. His forgiveness is infinitely more powerful than our guilt.

There are some people who are so full of guilt that they have a difficult time just setting foot in Church. Foremost of these are any who have been involved in abortion, either having one or convincing someone else to have one. There is nothing worse for a parent than the death of a child. There is no guilt deeper than those who have caused the death of a child. A wonderful, brave lady made the huge step and came to confession after forty years. She told me that she had broken all of the commandments. I tried to make it a bit easier for her, so I said, "I'm sure you haven't killed anyone." She responded, "Yes I did. I had an abortion." Our Diocese has asked the priests to address this issue with our people and to remind them that there is help. Project Rachel is a Diocesan Program to help those involved in an abortion accept forgiveness and move on with their lives. Our Pregnancy Center offers this program. The Family Life Office of the Diocese also has Project Rachel counselors. Actually, years ago I also attended a workshop and was certified to do this counseling. If you know of anyone suffering from having had or been involved in an abortion, remember, the Lord did not want that lady by the well hurting. Nor does he want us hurting, no matter what we have done. There is hope for a normal life, one where a person is once more comfortable in his or her own skin. Our hope is in the Lord. And this hope does not disappoint.

This also applies to all of the ways that we might feel shamefaced. Guilt is often too for us to carry. But when we give it to the Lord in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, confession, guilt dissolves. That is the reason why we have so many penance services and confession periods during Lent. We do not have to carry our burdens. Jesus carries them for us, all the way to Calvary. St. Paul reminds us in the second reading, "God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us."

For our well being, our emotional, physical and spiritual health, I am convinced it is crucial for us to perform three simple meditations every morning. I've often mentioned them. I suggest that we all do these as we get ready for the day, maybe while showering, or doing hair, or shaving, or whatever. The first is: God loves me with an unconditional love. He loves me for whom I am, not for what I do. Jesus loved that woman at the well for whom she was, a daughter of God, a sinful daughter of God, but still, a daughter of God. So we begin by saying, "Lord, you love me. Why? Because I am your son; I am your daughter."

Then we say, "God forgives me." The Divine Lover does not hold grudges. He forgives us. We need to forgive ourselves. "But the extent of my sins are deep, the results of my sins are wide," we complain. Think back to that lady at the well. How many people were hurt by her immoral lifestyle? How many children suffered as they were shuttled from one father to another? How many of them would grow up to imitate their mother's promiscuity? But Jesus still forgave her. His forgiveness was deeper and more powerful than her sins. It is also deeper and further reaching than our sins.

So, first, “God you love me with an unconditional love because I am your son, your daughter. And, second, “God, you forgive me. I need to forgive myself.”

Then we come to the morning offering. The third meditation is simply, “God you are with me today. Whatever I do, I do with you and for you.” That lady ran into town, glowing with love, knowing that God was with her. When the others saw the one who had been shamefaced full of joy, they ran out to meet Jesus. They wanted some of this, this love, this forgiveness, this presence. “Could He be the One who is the hope of the ages?” they asked. Then they came into his presence, and let him into their lives. “Yes, he is,” they exclaimed. “Yes, He is,” we agree.” He is our hope. And hope does not disappoint.

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