

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

St. John 4:5-42

This Gospel of the woman at the well is one of the most sensational texts of the Gospel. It is scandalous. The problem we have is that so little is scandalous because we have lost any real sense of shame. In fact, the lack of shame is seen as something of which to proud, but the lack of shame means that we have nothing to guard us against scandal. Shame is associated with sin. We know that because in Genesis we read that Adam and Eve, after turning from God, covered their naked bodies because they felt shame.

The woman at the well felt shame. It is the reason she came to the well at noon, the hottest part of the day and so the part of the day when all the other women of the town would be indoors and out of the heat. She had to go to the well at that time of the day because she had lived a life of shame by marrying six husbands. She was an outcast of the town and so, to protect herself, could only fetch water when no one else was about. Moreover, she was a Samaritan and Our Lord a Jew, and the Samaritans and Jews were sworn enemies and so for a Jewish man to ask a Samaritan woman was not only scandalous, for a man would never ask a woman for water, but a Jew would never ask a Samaritan for anything.

This woman was sorely wounded. Her life has been wretched apart by so many marriages and she now lived alienated from her neighbours, having to scurry about at noon much like we would talk today about people today hiding in the shadows. This woman was beaten down by life and tormented day by day by ridicule and scorn and frustration and resentment and this had left her alone and abandoned. For her nothing remained of dignity or self-righteousness or self-delusion. She was vulnerable but it was this vulnerability that meant there

were no trappings of pride to keep her from begging Our Lord for a life free of shame and torment that only He can give.

Why did God become man? He became man because we, so brutalised by our own sin could no longer raise ourselves up to Him so he lowered Himself to us. But we, blinded by pride and self-righteousness and self-delusion and alienated from one another cannot make ourselves vulnerable because to be vulnerable means that others will take advantage of us and none of us want that. But unless we make ourselves vulnerable, unless we feel shame for sin, then we can never approach the Sacraments and without the Sacrament of Penance—confession—we are not entitled to approach the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

On the day of our death we will face Our Lord and He will call us to Himself, but He will demand that we present ourselves to Him as we truly are, not as we think are. Let us pray that in this holy season of Lent we will seek the grace to submit ourselves to Our Lord in humility so that He came down to us may allow us to rise with Him.