



The Parish of Saint Anthony Glen Huntly

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Homily at Mass 3rd Sunday of Lent – 15 March 2020

Can you remember where you first met your husband/wife? Many older people remember meeting their future spouse at a parish dance. My mum and dad first met each other at a Stella Maris Seafarers social event – dad, a sailor, was in Melbourne for a weekend, and mum had responded to an appeal made in parishes to go along to the Seafarers Club to provide some friendship to our sailors in town. Over the years I've married young couples who have met on overseas holidays, at work, and one couple told me they met at the tram stop.

In the Bible, meeting at a well was not unusual. Abraham's servant found a future wife, Rebekah, for Isaac at a well. Likewise Jacob and Moses. In a hot desert land the well is an oasis – perhaps covered by the shade of trees, a place to draw water and to rest before carrying it home. While drawing water, or waiting your turn, it's an opportunity to linger, to pass the time of day, to chat. Perhaps young men were also drawn to the well because drawing water from a well was considered women's work. It was just the place to find a young girl, and possibly the girl of your dreams!

Today we find Jesus the Bridegroom at a well – not in his Jewish homeland but in a land considered a foreign land in New Testament times. This is the Good Shepherd going in search of the sheep. This is the Son of God looking for sinners. This is the Lord who reaches out not only to God's chosen nation, but to the likes of you and me, non-Jews, the Gentile people. The Samaritan woman at the well symbolizes you and me. This well is a trysting place, a place of encounter, a place for lovers. At the well Christ the Bridegroom meets a woman so often disappointed in love, a woman whose life was running on empty, a woman thirsty and parched, lonely and sad. Into her life steps Jesus whose love forgives the past and opens a new pathway, a fountain of love, mercy, peace, joy, freedom. Jesus is Living Water that refreshes our parched thirst and waters our arid lives.

Today's Gospel from the 4th chapter of St John's Gospel is the first of 5 fairly long Gospels that we will listen to in coming weeks. Next Sunday we will learn about the blind man healed at the Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem, and the Sunday after the dramatic story of the resurrection of Lazarus. And on Palm Sunday and Good Friday we will listen to the powerful accounts of Our Lord's suffering, death and burial from the Gospels of St Matthew and St John. The stories of the Woman at the Well, the Blind Man and Lazarus have a long history in the liturgy of Lent. They are catechetical stories for those preparing for Baptism at Easter. And they also shine a light on our faith journey, reminding us of all that Baptism means as you and I will renew the Promises of Baptism on Easter Day.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks of Baptism as the “doorway of the spiritual life” (n1213). Baptism breaks the chains of Original Sin. Baptism brings us into a relationship with God. Baptism introduces us into the family of God the Church. Baptism sets us on the path that includes the sacraments, prayer, charity, Heaven. In Baptism we share in Christ’s new and risen life. In Baptism God the Trinity makes his home in us. Baptism calls us to be witnesses to Christ, apostles of joy, messengers of peace. And all of this begins for most of us at the font in the first few weeks of life, before we can even speak!

The long story of the Samaritan woman is a lesson for each of us in the patience and gentleness of God. Our Lord leads the woman step by step on the path of conversion. It takes a while for her to think things through, to come to realise who it is she has encountered at the well, that the man Jesus is different to all the other men she has met in her life. Jesus thirsts for her, her love, her heart, herself, for her happiness, her joy, her freedom, her salvation. Sitting down by our side now here at Mass today he thirsts for the same thing from you and me. Jesus loves and values you because of you. He is thirsty for your love. He wants to pour out a fountain of love, mercy, freedom, forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation on each one of us. He wants you and me to take steps in faith, one after the other, each day, as we grow in his friendship. He wants to open his heart, and allow your heart to resonate with his love, to speak freely and openly to him and feel the warmth of him, sitting there with you now.