

Homily for Sunday, March 8, 2026

I mentioned in last weekend's homily how I believed that while Jesus was transfigured, on Mount Tabor, it was the apostles who were ultimately transformed. Transformation isn't cosmetic; it makes a deep claim on you and changes you forever. There is a definite "before" and a definite "after." You were



one person before the experience, and you were clearly another person after. The Samaritan woman at the well is a classic story of transformation. *Before*, she was a woman who came to the well sheepishly trying to avoid others, especially gossipers. *After*, she couldn't

wait to tell the whole world what this encounter with Jesus did for her.

For Jesus, this woman must have been like a breath of fresh air. She is like a student who is open to receiving anything and everything the Teacher wants to give her. In the previous chapter, Jesus tried to give his wisdom to a Pharisee named Nicodemus, but it didn't go well. Nicodemus, unlike this woman, was not receptive to what Jesus wanted to give, and so it leaves Jesus tired. That's why today's story begins with telling us that Jesus sat by the well tired.

In the physical world, we feel nourished and energized only after we have taken food into ourselves. That's how our body works, but that is not how our spirit works. In the world of spirit, you feel satisfied when you give away spirit especially

to someone who is eager to receive it. You'll notice, at the end of the story, when the disciples come with food and say, "**Rabbi, eat something**" he refuses. Why? Because, although he has not eaten any physical food, he is, nonetheless, spiritually full. There's no need for him to eat. He says, "**I have food to eat that you don't know about. My food is to do the will of my Father and to complete his work.**" What is the will of the Father? To give life away. "I want to give you the only thing I have--God, Spirit, life-giving water--and I have no other agenda," Jesus seems to be saying. But this work of Jesus will never be complete unless we open to this eternal life and receive it. Can you believe in a reality whose only agenda is to give us life whether you are in a state of grace or disgrace, whether we're in a valid marriage or in an irregular marriage? Can we believe in a reality that loves the person who has been married five times just as much as the person who have been faithful to their vows for 50 years? Can we believe in a reality that loves us just the way we are and not the way we ought to be?

The Samaritan woman was thirsting her whole life for such a reality and found it in Jesus. Just who is this who sits at the well of our life knowing everything we've done—the good and the bad—and says in the face of it all, "Come as you are and drink life-giving water because it bothers me so much to see you thirsty"?

This woman firstly brings herself to Jesus then becomes a channel of bringing others. But it all started, on her part, with a lifetime of thirsting. Jesus met her in her thirsting and meets us in our thirsting as well. The Hebrew people, we heard in that first reading, thirsted in the desert, and God provided for them. Not because they were deserving, but because God delights in quenching peoples'

thirsts. St. Paul says the same thing in that second reading. “God poured out the Holy Spirit into our hearts not because we were deserving of it but simply because God sees our thirst and delights in quenching it. While we were weak and ungodly and undeserving Christ died for us.” God doesn’t wait until we become worthy before offering us the Spirit.

Growing in faith is a process, and how patient God must be with us! Notice the progression in the Samaritan woman and the patience Jesus has with her. She initially wants to avoid or push Jesus away. She wonders why a Jewish man would ask her, a Samaritan woman, to provide him with something—water from a well. In other words, “I don’t know who you are, but don’t you know that you’re not following gender roles and social norms? You’ll get us both in trouble. Don’t you know that unchaperoned women are not supposed to be in public with men?” Jesus does know this. But has no intention of leaving his place at the well because people and relationships are more important than rules. If she is going to stay, and risk getting in trouble because of it, he’s going to stay right there with her. He sees in this woman’s heart a person who is thirsting for relationship. She has not found life in her five previous husbands nor in the man she is with now. Nor has she found a relationship, a friendship, with other women as she has deliberately come to the well at *noon*, the time no other women would be expected to be there. She belongs in no one’s world. Nobody talks with her, only about her. But Jesus talks with her. Early in the conversation she says, “**Sir, you have no bucket.**” He’s just another man, another “Sir,” who won’t go away even though it’s against all the rules.

Next, Jesus reveals to her that he knows she's had five husbands and the one she is with now is not her husband. Then out of her mouth comes one of the funniest lines in all four gospels, ***"Sir, I see that you are a Prophet."*** If one of you sitting out there had five husbands or five wives and were stringing along a sixth, I don't think it would take a prophet to figure it out. Any idiot can figure that out. Nevertheless, she does move from calling him "sir" to calling him a "prophet." She doesn't recoil at the idea that this man can somehow see into her private life. She rejoices that he knows the whole story and instead of judging her, like everyone else does, he loves her in her honesty. She can entrust more of her heart to such a person.

This "sir" is more than a "sir" to her; he's a prophet. And this prophet is more than a prophet to her; he's the Messiah. She says to the people back in her city, ***"Come and see the man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"***

Her faith doesn't grow instantaneously; it grows in stages. So does our faith. First you encounter an ordinary person who you certainly were not seeking out as you started your day—a "sir". Then you realize this person knows and loves, like only a prophet can, all the parts of you that you find hard to love in yourself. Lastly, you entertain the idea that you might be in the presence of the Messiah, the only one who can satisfy the deepest thirsts of your soul. You move from "sir" to "prophet" to "Messiah" and leaving your water jar behind, like she did, you can hardly contain your new-found joy.

This story, we are told, happened at noon. It's a story about an unnamed woman's thirst. She's unnamed because she is every person who has ever lived, every person who have ever thirsted for something more in life. While it is a story about human thirst, I think it's even more a story about Jesus' thirst. The only other story that mentions noon and thirst is the story of the crucifixion. At noon, from the Cross, Jesus said, "I thirst." Why is he thirsting? Because, with the last ounce of strength he wants to give his Spirit to us, yet almost nobody wants to receive it. That's what makes him thirst; that's what makes him tired. All he ever wanted to be was food and drink for us. Yet, he never stopped giving it to us even as we would not eat and drink.

Who is this one who still sits at the well of our lives and says, "I thirst"? It is the same Jesus who sat at Jacob's well and said to the woman, "Oh, if you only knew who was saying to you, 'Give me a drink' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." He's dying for you and me to ask. He rolled back the stone covering the well in the same way he rolled back the stone covering the tomb. Out of both comes eternal life just for the asking.

~Fr. Phil