

The Rev. Mr. Daren J. Zehnle  
26/27 February 2005  
Sacred Heart Parish, Effingham, Illinois

The Third Sunday of Lent (A)

"Strike the rock, and the water will flow from it for the people to drink" (Exodus 17:6). What a strange command from the Lord God, but even so, Moses did as he was told. His complete faith in the commands of God should impress us and inspire us. Moses did not question God, pointing out to him the foolishness of such an action; everybody knows that water does not come from a rock. How many of us, I wonder, would actually hit a rock with a stick to get water, even if so instructed by God? It makes no sense. Would we have the faith, the trust, or the courage to do so? It is a ridiculous action and yet it works "for nothing will be impossible for God" (Luke 1:37). In the desert the water flowed forth from the rock struck with the staff of Moses.

Although this part of salvation history is indeed strange and perhaps a bit bizarre, it is not altogether unknown at other times in the passing of time. St. Paul tells us that this rock, the rock struck by Moses, is the Christ, it is Jesus (I Corinthians 10:4). Moses struck Jesus with his staff and water gushed forth to quench the thirst of the people. As Jesus hung upon the cross on Calvary, the Roman soldier Longinus "thrust

his lance into his side, "and immediately blood and water flowed out" (John 19:34). What Moses prefigured, Jesus fulfilled.

This water that flows from the side of Jesus is the life-giving water he promised to the Samaritan woman and "this water will become in [us] a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14). This living water which Jesus gives to us is nothing less than the Eucharist, his very Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity. Our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, has given us this year to focus our spiritual attention upon the Eucharist in order to grow in greater union with Christ, to share more fully in his divine life.

It is his very self that Jesus wishes to give to the Samaritan woman, but before doing so he must clear the way for her to receive him. He says to her "Go call your husband and come back" (John 4:16). The only reason to go to the well at noon, in the heat of the day, when everybody else in the village was resting, was to be away from them because she was a sinner. The woman, perplexed and fearful, says to the Lord, "I do not have a husband" (John 4:17). She is honest with Jesus and so he responds, "You are right in saying, 'I do not have a husband.' For you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true" (John 4:17-18).

Jesus tells her everything that she has ever done and she does not question him; she does not demand how he knows this of

her; she does not defend herself or make excuses; she does not shy away or hide; she admits to him the truth of his statement: that she is living a life of sin and has for a long time (John 4:39). She confesses of Jesus, "I can see that you are a prophet" (John 4:19). Would we do the same?

How often do we hide our sins from ourselves and from God? How often do we make excuses for our sins, somehow seeking to justify them? How often do we blame others for our sins, like Adam who defended himself, saying, "The woman whom you put here with me - she gave me fruit from the tree, and so I ate it;" or, in effect, "the woman made me do it" (Genesis 3:12). Or, like Eve, "The serpent tricked me into it, so I ate it" (Genesis 3:13). We are ashamed of our sins and so we hide our faults from the Lord, or so we think.

When our consciences bring to mind our sins, it is Jesus himself who reminds us of them, for he knows all that we have done. He knows our successes and accomplishments; he knows our failings and our fallings. Just as he did with the Samaritan woman, he shows us each of our sins and says to us, "The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). When we admit to him our sins and beg his mercy and forgiveness he will grant it, for his "love endures forever" (Psalm 118:1). So great is his love for us that he desires to

give us his very self for our food and our drink to that we might have everlasting life.

The Samaritan woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Christ; when he comes, he will tell us everything" (John 4:25). Jesus told her that he is the one who is coming and we know this to be true. She looked for the coming of the Messiah and he came to her; he does the same for us when we look for his coming.

Indeed, he comes to us each and every time the Mass is celebrated, each time we gather around the altar to receive the Eucharist. He comes to us under the appearance of bread and wine, what we know to have been changed by his power into his very Body and Blood. And just as he did with the Samaritan woman, he will tell us everything we need to receive salvation and the glory of the kingdom of God.

The woman saw Jesus and knew him as the Christ. She told others of her encounter with him and they, in turn, believed in him and "invited him to stay with them" (John 4:40). As Jesus stayed with them they encountered him in the same way as had the Samaritan woman and they said to her, "We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world" (John 4:42). May the same be true of us this Lent as we repent of our sins

and turn toward the grace and mercy of our loving Savior, Jesus Christ.

**At 8:30 Mass:**

We have with us this morning our Elect and Candidates who seek full communion with us around the altar of the Lord. In these days of purification and enlightenment, they, together with us, implore the mercy of the Lord and seek his forgiveness. They seek to change their lives in conformity with the teachings of Christ and of his Church. As they journey with us through these days of Lent toward the Easter feast, I invite them now to come forward for the first of the three scrutinies.