

Fr. John Homily for March 12, 2023. Third Sunday of Lent

JMJ CHS

The picture that we are showing up on the screen is from the hallway near our entrance to the Activity Center. It's a modern painting of today's Gospel scene by the Polish artist Henryk Siemieradski. Jesus is sitting in the shade at Jacob's well near the city of Sychar (you can see it in the distance). This is in Samaria, south of Galilee and North of Jerusalem. I guess you could call it something like a no-man's-land for Jews because Jews and Samaritans didn't get along. But it is a shorter distance for those who traveled between those two areas. They just probably had to put up with some insults along the way. Now, I don't think the Samaritans would be called gentiles because of their common origins with the Jews, but they might have been something similar to a gentile.

Jews and Samaritans believed in the same God but there were other significant differences and over the years things turned sour between them. A lot of "bad blood". Nevertheless, Jesus asks a local woman for a glass of water. She is surprised and incredulous, probably for two reasons. First off, the *bad-blood* thing. And secondly, she was a woman. And women were second-class citizens throughout the land.

Now thanks to *The Chosen*, this passage from John's Gospel has taken on a new meaning for the current generation. The art of painting is one thing, but film and the art of movie making has helped us to better visualize and to understand this biblical scene.

Tradition has given the woman a name, *Photina*, but for many generations, she has typically been known, anonymously, as *The Samaritan Woman*, or *The Woman at the Well* and she was very well portrayed in *The Chosen* with a lot of people claiming that as their favorite episode based on her 'excitable' performance.

One thing we can say for sure about her is that she was among the original evangelists. Maybe the very first. Because as soon as Jesus revealed Himself as the Messiah, along with His knowing those sordid details of her life, she was immediately convinced. This was the truth and she quickly ran into town to tell her neighbors the "Good News".

It must have been an unusual scene because from what we can tell, she probably would have been an outsider there in her own hometown. A woman who had a "reputation". Nevertheless, she boldly shared her newfound faith with her neighbors. And they believed her. It certainly was an emotional scene for us who watched, and after the Apostles, she is certainly one of the first examples of Jesus choosing an 'unlikely candidate' to do His bidding.

I'd like to address two major points. First the 'woman' thing and secondly the 'gentile' thing.

Yes, women, along with children, were of a lower status than the men. The men ruled the roost. But it seems to me that Jesus came to change that. And we could start the discussion with His choice of how He would come into this world. By way of a woman. A very special one; *Mary of Nazareth*.

There are some Christian traditions that consider this a *secondary* piece of information. That she was just a mere 'vehicle' by which the savior would become a man. This is obviously not the case with us Catholics. No, for us, Mary is 'the one' chosen from all eternity, The One Conceived without sin so as to be the Mother of God, and the new *Ark of the Covenant*. This is big. And it didn't end with Mary.

Take for instance, the other Mary. Mary Magdalen. Jesus cast out seven demons from her and she became one of Jesus' closest and most faithful followers.

The *Chosen* director may have used a little bit of artistic license in presenting some women as real characters, but there were indeed women along the way who are biblical. We have Peter's mother-in-law, who was healed by Jesus. We have the woman who was healed of the blood flow. The Canaanite woman of Tyre and Sidon, a pagan, whose daughter was delivered from a demon. The widow of Nain, whose son was raised from the dead. We have Veronica, who wipes the face of Jesus (she might be legendary, she's not in the Gospels but she's the sixth station of the cross). And then the women of Jerusalem, who lamented Him on *The Via Dolorosa*.

Finally, we have Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward and one of those who visited the tomb with Mary Magdalen on that first Easter Sunday morning. Jesus healed all these women in very dramatic ways, and they followed Him and supported His ministry.

All of this, not to mention the many female saints of our Catholic Church who were chosen by God to do incredible things – Felicity and Perpetua, Philomena, St. Joan of Arc, Mother Teresa and countless others.

So I think it's safe to say that Jesus has elevated women in the world to a new status from what it was in the old testament era.

OK, I mentioned earlier that the Samaritans were probably not considered gentiles, but that they might be something close. A gentile by definition is a non-Jew. Technically speaking then, we Christians are gentiles, and according to the old rules, Jews would not be allowed to associate with us. Contact with us would defile them, would make them unclean. But it became apparent that it was Jesus's desire that all people would be welcomed in His Father's house. Remember at *the cleansing of the temple* that Jesus, cried out, "*My Father's House shall be a house of prayer for all people.*"

And if you recall from that final bombastic episode of *The Chosen* in season 3, again with a little bit of 'artistic license', we saw the feeding of the 5000 take place in *The Decapolis*, the area to the east of the Jordan and not in Galilee. The term means *The 10 Cities* and it was a Jewish/pagan/gentile territory and, as was depicted in the story, they didn't get along very well. The Jews, thinking, once again that they are *the chosen people* and nobody else counts for anything. Jesus came to change all that. And as we found out by the end of the story, all people would indeed be welcomed into God's House. Thus we have the Church that was founded by Jesus and which we see in every corner of the world and which we call the Universal Church.

At the other two Masses, we welcomed our elect.....

(In a few moments, we will be welcoming our elect up for a blessing.)

In addition our confirmation students are here on retreat this weekend in preparation for a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

May they all be inspired by the Woman of Samaria, that Woman at the Well and soon come to share the good news with the world with the same degree of faith, energy, enthusiasm, and courage that she did.

~Fr. John