

5th Sunday of Lent

Are you kidding me? Another super-long Gospel? Over the past three weeks we have heard three of the longest Gospel passages we ever have the privilege of hearing at Mass (except for the Passion).

2 weeks ago we heard about the Woman at the Well. Last week, The Man Born Blind. And this weekend, The Raising of Lazarus.

A woman goes to a well to quench her thirst and leaves with much more than she could have imagined. And she is NEVER THE SAME.

A man, blind from birth, has sight given to him by a man he doesn't even know. And he is NEVER THE SAME.

And a man walks out from the tomb in complete disbelief at what had happened – shocked to hear that it was his friend who had brought it about. And he is NEVER THE SAME.

And at the heart of each of these three stories is something relatively simple and yet life-changing at the same time. The one element present in each of these three stories is an ENCOUNTER –an ENCOUNTER with Jesus, an ENCOUNTER with God – an ENCOUNTER that changes everything. For the woman at the well it is through a profound CONVERSATION. For the blind man it is the HEALING TOUCH of a stranger. For the dead man it is a POWER conveyed through the COMMAND of a dear friend.

Three ENCOUNTERS with Jesus. Three unique situations. Yet, the outcome is ultimately the same – individuals being changed in ways they could not have imagined – defying any other explanation other than being God. They each, in their own unique way, ended the day much different from the way they started it. Everything was new. Everything was full of hope. Everything was full of new possibilities. And that lies at the heart of what Lent is all about. It's not about beating ourselves up. It's not about doing every single simple devotion "right". It's certainly not about "proving" to others or to ourselves that we have the will power to give something up. Rather, it's about coming out of these 40 days (and with the coronavirus) maybe even more than 40 days – that is waking up on Easter morning (hopefully we will be celebrating Easter as a Church family) – CHANGED FOREVER. And not because of our goodness or through our power or efforts, but through the power of our loving and merciful God Who wants nothing more than to change us – not for a day but FOREVER. AND THAT TAKES AN ENCOUNTER.

What are some elements that are important to ENCOUNTERING JESUS? It takes CONVERSING with Him. It takes allowing Him to TOUCH us. It takes LISTENING to His Voice and RESPONDING to it in Faith. And the practices of Lent can help us do precisely that. That journey of these forty days (plus) can help LEAD US TO PRECISELY WHERE WE NEED TO BE. If we allow it.

The truth is, when we hear Jesus calling for Lazarus to COME OUT – we need to also hear Him SAYING THOSE SAME WORDS TO US, calling us out from the tomb, calling us from the darkness – the darkness of our selfishness – the darkness of our resentment and hate – the darkness of our grudges and desire for revenge – the darkness of our prejudices – the darkness of sin.

May NEVER BEING THE SAME not only be the ending to the story of a woman at the well, the story of the blind man and the story of Lazarus. May it also be the ending of each of OUR stories this day, this week, this Lent – and for all time.