

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

There are powerful forces that keep us from fully engaging in recovery. Shame convinces us that we are uniquely broken. Secrecy protects us from exposure but also isolates us. Denial softens the truth so we do not have to face the depth of our powerlessness. These coping strategies once helped us survive, but over time they kept us trapped. Fear and harsh facts rarely move us into lasting change. What begins to loosen their grip is something quieter and stronger: hope.

This Sunday's second reading speaks directly to that foundation (Romans 5:1-2, 5):

Brothers and sisters: Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God. And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Hope does not disappoint because it is rooted in God's love, not in our performance. In recovery, hope often begins when we encounter others who have found freedom from addiction and despair. We may walk into a meeting convinced that nothing will change. Then someone shares honestly about a demoralized past and a restored life. We recognize our story in theirs. Something shifts. We begin to imagine that freedom might be possible for us as well.

This Sunday's gospel reading details an exchange between Jesus and a Samaritan woman, giving us a vivid image of how hope begins (John 4:7-9, 13-15):

A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?"... Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

The Samaritan woman arrives at the well carrying more than a jar. She carries shame and a complicated history. Jesus does not approach her with condemnation. He begins with a simple request and then offers living water. He speaks to her deeper thirst. Many of us can relate. We chased substances, behaviors, or attachments believing they would satisfy us. Yet the thirst returned, often stronger than before.

In recovery, we begin to recognize that our cravings are not just physical or emotional. They are spiritual. We long to be known, accepted, and restored. When we share honestly and are met with dignity instead of judgment, hope grows. Like the woman at the well, we may find ourselves telling our story differently. What once defined us no longer has the final word.

The woman leaves her water jar behind and returns to her town to share what she has experienced. Hope spreads through testimony. In the same way, the message of recovery travels from one person to another. We do not persuade others through argument. We offer our

experience, strength, and hope. Over time, others begin to believe not only because of our words, but because they encounter Christ for themselves.

Lent is a season that exposes our thirst. It invites us to bring our shame and secrecy into the light. As we do, we discover that hope is not wishful thinking. It is confidence that God's love is already at work within us. The living water Christ offers does not erase our past, but it transforms it. In that transformation, we find freedom to live honestly and to help others find the same.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- When have you experienced hope growing through another person's honest sharing in recovery?
- Where do shame or secrecy still try to keep you isolated from others?
- What does it look like for you to receive the living water Christ offers in your recovery today?

MASS READINGS

FIRST READING Exodus 17:3-7

RESP. PS. Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

SECOND READING Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

GOSPEL John 4:5-42

