

Third Sunday of Lent



There are powerful forces keeping us from actively engaging in life-saving recovery. Shame, secrecy, and denial are built-in coping mechanism that prevent us from being overwhelmed by the powerlessness of our lust addiction and sexual compulsions. Unfortunately, they also keep us stuck in our seemingly intolerable situations. Fear and facts, which are commonly used to influence change, prove to be an ineffective way to overcome such obstacles. Instead, faith grows when we act on what little faith we have.

Our outlook and attitude about our situation can change when we are met with reactions that differ from our expectations. Typically, when we share the source of our shame with others, we expect condemnation and misunderstanding. The "magic" of recovery happens when others relate to our experience, embrace us with dignity, and share how they found freedom from a demoralized past.

There is a word to describe the fruit of these interactions: hope. This Sunday's Mass readings establish hope as an element of the Christian life that cannot be overlooked. Saint Paul does not mix words as he writes in this Sunday's Second Reading:

*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.*

The hope we pass along to each other can spur willingness and create a foundation for honesty and change. Once the possibility of a new life is established, we can begin imagining a life free of our addictive and compulsive behavior. Hope also strengthens us through challenges that we will inevitably face in our recovery.

Along with faith and charity, hope is one of three theological virtues. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes, "The virtue of hope responds to the aspiration to happiness which God has placed in the heart of every [person].... It keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during times of abandonment; it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude. Buoyed up by hope, he is preserved from selfishness and led to the happiness that flows from charity" (1818).

This Sunday's Gospel Reading tells the story of a woman meeting Jesus at a watering hole. "Give me a drink," he requests of her. Filled with shame, secrecy, and denial, she rebukes Him. However, Jesus knows that the woman's thirst is spiritual, not just physical. We can relate our own cravings with the gracious response of Jesus:

*"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."*

Jesus then tells the woman her own story, an act which we may have experienced ourselves in a recovery meeting. She proclaims the fountain of life presented by Jesus and shares hope with her whole town. This is precisely how Christian hope and the message of recovery travels:

*Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him
because of the word of the woman who testified...
Many more began to believe in him because of his word,
and they said to the woman,
"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."*

- What experience do you have with the forces of shame, secrecy, and denial?
- How was hope presented to you as you made the transition into recovery and a spiritual way of life?
 - How do you pass it along to others?
- How are you experiencing Jesus in the sacraments during this season of Lent?

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First Reading: Exodus 17:3-7

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

Second Reading: Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

Gospel: John 4:5-42