

[Readings: Exodus 17:3-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-2, 5-8; John 4:5-42]

We probably all have a friend like this: the one who says, "Let's talk" -- and promptly proceeds to do all the talking. It's tough to have a one-sided conversation. The root word "converse" means both "to associate with" and "to turn around." Conversing implies getting together and passing the talking stick from one to the next. Genuine conversation is also a far cry from chitchat. As the point of view revolves around, ideas grow and change. Information is shared and increased. New awareness becomes available to all in a spiral of ascent.

Jesus has such a conversation with the Samaritan woman. Such conversations are rarely recorded in the gospels. When Jesus is recruiting followers, He doesn't waste words: "Come," he says, and they either do or don't.

When He teaches the crowds, there's no dialogue. When other rabbis come to Him with trick questions, few are hankering for a true sharing of ideas. The rarely noted conversations are between Jesus and his faithful disciples. After a public teaching, Jesus retreats with His friends, answers their questions, and explores the deeper meanings of what He's been saying and doing. He'll even suggest what they can expect next.

The gospels don't present these conversations in much detail. We're often merely told that Jesus goes aside with his friends; the rest happens offstage. A few times in John's account, however, a longer conversation goes on the record.

In the gospels, only with the Samaritan woman does genuine conversation take place. She alone, this nameless woman, ascends in understanding as a result of thoughtful time spent with Jesus. Information turns to revelation, and new life comes to many -- all because one woman was willing to talk. In this generation, where are the real conversations happening, and how can we be part of them? I submit that they happen when you are thirsty, uncomfortable, and feeling you don't belong. In today's Scriptures you learn that having a relationship with Jesus satisfies all your thirsts and fulfills your hopes. This experience of being understood and wanting to understand makes you human.

This desire to satisfy your longings is the bridge where Jesus meets you. That is the conversation God wants to have with you so that you may be healed and go on in grace and peace to proclaim what God has done for you.

In every parish I have been assigned, the Number One Concern people share with me is their spiritual hunger. Their spiritual thirst. Their emptiness and loneliness. There is a special place in every human heart that is designed for the Lord alone to enter and to rest: to “pitch His tent” in the center of our life-source.

What prevents Jesus Christ from fully entering your heart? Maybe there is too much Massah and Meribah in our lives. “Massah” means “the place of testing” and “Meribah” means “the place of quarrelling.” Too many times we give in to temptation and to many times we squawk and scream at each other like barbarians.

Interestingly, solitude is the cure for loneliness. People say to me, “aren’t you lonely living in that big house next to the church by yourself?” I say, there is a difference between being alone, being lonely, and being in solitude. I love the solitude after a long and busy day!

When we are afraid of being alone, we should go into it. Dive deep into it. Solitude teaches profound lessons, especially about ourselves. Feeling lonely has value. Sometimes we need to turn inward to discover what we need to hold on to and what we need to let go of. Once we turn inward and are at peace with ourselves and with the Lord, we can turn outward as Christian Stewards.

Once upon a time, a master showed two rooms to his two disciples and told them to fill the room with something. The first man tried to fill his room with hay and corn husks, but he couldn’t fill it. The other man lit some fragrant candles and played some melodious hymns in his room. Then the room was filled with fragrance and music.

The master describes these two ways for everyone. We can fill our hearts with either hay or light. Initially, the woman at the well tries to fill her heart with five friendships of chaff (corn husks), but she utterly failed.

Jesus tells her, "You will be thirsty again if you drink from that well where you were drinking." Life comes from water and is purified and glorified by water. This weekend's readings are about living water and new life. The Bible says that Jesus is the living water. Water represents the Spirit of God which comes to us in baptism. That Spirit quenches our spiritual thirst.

St. Paul, in our Second Reading, highlights that Jesus, our savior, poured out the living water into our hearts. The Samaritan woman in our Gospel receives the living water. She was thirsty, even when she had five friendships. Jesus awakens this woman and tells her, "You will be thirsty again if you drink from that well where you were drinking."

The Samaritan woman found the Messiah in Jesus step by step. It transformed her life. This is what happens when we grow in prayer. We start with a superficial level of relationship with the Lord, and in time, it develops into a profound friendship. First, she found in Jesus a thirsty young man in His early thirties. That is why she points out the caste and color of Jesus when He asks for a drink. "How can you, a Jew, ask me for a drink?" (John 6:9). Second, she slowly realizes that Jesus is a little more than father Jacob. "Are you greater than our father Jacob?" (John 4:12)

Third, when Jesus points out her past sinful life, five husbands, immediately she finds in Jesus a prophet. "I can see that you are a Prophet" (John 4:19). So she begs Jesus to be the living water so that she would not be thirsty again. Fourth, when she fully receives the Spirit of God, she loudly proclaims, "You are the Messiah, You are the Christ, the Savior of the world!"

Then she surrenders herself to Jesus and drops her bucket, the bucket of sin, at the foot of Jesus and receives the source of living water and goes away. She goes to the town and proclaims to her people, "I saw the Messiah, the one who is to come." Like the Samaritan woman, we need to allow Jesus to enter into our personal lives. Step by step, layer by layer.

Prayer is the first fundamental aspect of Christian stewardship. A necessary part of the Christian disciple's vocation is to pray. Prayer makes us aware of God and opens us to God's love. Prayer gradually makes us realize our

complete dependence on God. Prayer also makes us realize the great power we have as disciples to use our own gifts in a meaningful way.

The desire to pray is a gift from God. So radical is our dependence on the graciousness of the Lord that we cannot even desire to pray unless God invites us. Spoiler alert! God invites ALL of us! Even the beginnings, the urges to pray, are sheer gift. The desire to pray is a clear sign of God's presence in our lives, for without God's presence, we could not desire God. Pray for the desire to pray if you don't have it yet.

The Gospels are full of occasions when Jesus paused from His public ministry, departed from the crowds, went off to a lonely place and prayed. The work of each day was closely bound up with prayer as Jesus Christ showed us that prayer was the center of his Messianic ministry and paschal death.

Today's Christian makes specific time for daily prayer, pausing during each day to glorify God. By taking time out for prayer, we are following Christ: not only learning to be his disciples, but also sharing our experience of God. That prayer can be not only in church, but in the car or bus during your commute, in your favorite recliner with the TV off, at study hall or while waiting to check out at the supermarket. Tevye from "Fiddler on the Roof" prayed to God as if in conversation with Him as he made the rounds delivering milk to the villagers.

Establish a routine for prayer, as you do for study, sports and entertainment. Pope Francis challenges us this Lent to look at our Bibles each day as often as we look at our cell phones!

If you are already a person who spends time each day devoted to prayer, you understand why it is vitally important that those who are to be invited to Christian stewardship must first learn the fundamental importance of taking time to pray and bless God for all that we have and all that we are. Go to the well! Come to the well! Drink, and never be thirsty again! AMEN!