

## St Pius & St Anthony 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday Lent Homily 2026 Year A John 4:5-42

One of the slandering attacks the Pharisees leveled at Jesus is found in Luke 15:2 where they accuse that “This man receives sinners ***and even eats with them.***” (*pick up the racist ‘them’!*) Luke’s gospel emphasizes Jesus’ Table Fellowship – because eating and drinking together, sharing food and drink is a ‘family-making’ activity (breaking down divisions). So, Luke’s gospel is filled with Jesus’ meals, banquets & feasts, such as two major ones like feeding of the five thousand and the Last Supper (*some bible scholars say Jesus eats His way through Luke’s gospel!*) Such eating and drinking together is Jesus’ way of making family. Eating/drinking together is familial activity--you share the same cups, same utensils, touching foods and drinking after one another– so we see a version of this in John’s gospel today of what I call ‘Well Fellowship’ – making family over a drink. I suggest that with Jesus’ unusual request of the woman ‘Give me a drink’, He is initiating a familial relationship with her – drawing her into relationship (which is so needed, considering the racial, gender and personal alienation, division and distance that she was experiencing in her broken life). This is what Jesus came to do - unite people, break down divisions and renew the sense of shared humanity we all have in common (isn’t that what baptism does – reveals a water bond that is thicker than blood-making us one family in Him-God?) Jesus’ request of a drink from her, moves us into family territory. What I mean is that such close sharing is only done among family. For example, when I was a kid (I have two brothers), let’s say my brother opens a bottled Coke, and I say ‘Oh great, Chris, can I have a drink?’ And he gestures at the bottle, ‘Oh, a drink of this’ and proceeds to lick all over the mouth of the bottle - and I just respond, ‘Sure, hand it here, we’re family!’ This is family territory. An example of the opposite of this was when my cub scout pack went camping and our bug juice (Kool Aid was called that because it legendarily got ants in it once unknown to us) was stored on the picnic table in a huge Igloo 32 quart cooler. When a couple of scouts started to drink straight out of the spout with their mouths all over it, they got attacked – we were not family yet!

So, to have a refreshing moment sharing food or drink with someone breaks down socially-divisive barriers. We are getting into family territory! I suggest that the woman at the well senses Jesus is wishing to enter into deeper-meaningful relationship to her, by His unusual request. Why? Her response to Him indicates that she picks up on His desire to get close to her – She says, “You don’t even have a jug/bucket” (Jn 4:11). She means, “What are you going to drink out of? My cup or even more close, my hand?” And for her to give him a drink is going to bring them scandalously near each other & even intimately touching. Jesus is making

her family (& *The disciples and their search for food in town, and their return to Jesus asking Him what He has been eating is a further level of 'food& drink' family making – Jn 4:8, 31-34*)

But interestingly, I draw a connection in the gospel of John's early chapters that we can see water running all through the first four chapters: John's first chapter has the Baptist pointing Jesus out, saying that while John only uses water, Jesus will bring Spirit (Jn 1:26,33). Then the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter has the great Cana miracle of water turned into wine (and lots of it). The 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter has Nicodemus & Jesus talk at length about the baptismal birthing waters that bring us into second life, and then the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter we have here, with Jesus and Woman at Well engaged, discussing what unites us, seeing past, all differences (divisive racial, gendered, religious and historical offenses). Jesus reveals His 'Spirit & Truth' heart of the matter that intends to unite us all under one Heavenly Father – 'True Worship of Living God'. The line in today's gospel most worthy of extended mediation for us is when, Jesus says in Jn 4:14 *"Whoever drinks the water I give, will never thirst; the water I give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."* Jesus has read this woman's heart as He reads all of our hearts. We are not different to Him – He washes away all differences/prejudices that we put up-against others. Jesus is always about connecting! So, I want to add a little more about the actual dialogue between the woman and Jesus and what unites them, because Water wells are not only known as 'watering holes' but they are also 'hitching posts' biblically. Throughout the Old Testament, water wells are known as places where many marriages get arranged. For example, Abraham's servant meets-brings home Isaac's future wife Rebekkah from a well (Genesis 24:10–61), as does Abraham's grandson, Jacob, who meets his wife Rachel at a well (also at noon Genesis 29:1–20). Even Moses, meets his wife at a well (Exodus 2:15–22). (An interesting Christian legend from the Proto-Gospel of James tells that Mary was drawing water from a well when the Angel Gabriel announced to her that she would bear the child Savior Jesus-chap 11 of Proto-evangelium of James.) And to highlight this marriage theme and what Jesus is up to here (*wishing {?}*) to unite us human beings to covenantal life with God again-together). We find that the woman has had a broken sinful life (maybe hers is extreme, but who among us hasn't hurt with brokenness in this world?). She has sought love and failed, having many attempts at marriage. Jesus has read her heart to reveal that she has had five husbands and is currently trying & failing at another attempted one. If we do the math, interestingly, this now makes Jesus the seventh and most significant MAN in her life! The 7<sup>th</sup> time's the charm (7 is so symbolic a number to John)! And as we see, this match is eternal-to stay! Continuing this marriage theme, we can connect the empty jar she leaves at the well, with the six empty jars Jesus fills at the Wedding at Cana, not to mention that John the Baptist actually says that Jesus is our 'bridegroom' in Jn 3:29 (*And John is the 'groomsmen'--another such reference is in Mt 9:15*)

So, this new relationship of hers (and ours) is the most deeply satisfying for her and for us, ***if we enter into it.*** If we ask of Jesus that we want to receive this life giving water that is Him! And isn't that what we are all after? What truly satisfies our souls! Jesus alone. Nothing in this world fills that spot within our soul for God! We can try filling it with possessions, privilege, power and popularity, but they all go as quick as they come. Only God alone how satisfies! Lent teaches us to long for that which truly lasts – Jesus' Living Water within us!

What does St Augustine say but that, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in God!" (*Confessions Book I, chapter 1,1*) Or St Paul says that in comparison to Christ, "everything is loss" (*Philippians 3:8*)