Father O'Connor's Homily for 8 March 2026
Third Sunday of Lent – A

Exodus 17: 3-7
Romans 5: 1-2, 5-8
John 4: 5-42

An engaged couple was meeting with the woman who would be baking and decorating their wedding cake. The soon-to-be bride and groom were very devoted to the Scriptures and chose this verse from the First Letter of John 4: 18 for their wedding cake: ***"Love has no room for fear. Perfect love casts out all fear."***

When they entered their wedding reception hall they saw their cake for the first time. The baker knew a lot about cakes but not much about the Bible. Instead of the First Letter of John 4: 18, she opened to the Gospel of John 4: 18, and on the cake she had inscribed: ***"You have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband"*** – a quote from today's Gospel about Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well.

Samaritans and Jews did not get along. Jesus had come into Samaria with His disciples. He was tired and sat down by a well while the disciples went into town to buy lunch. The Gospel says it was noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water from that well, and Jesus said to her, ***"Give me a drink."***

Notice that she was there by herself. The townspeople would have come early in the morning while it was still cool. And they would have done what people still do today around office coffee makers and water coolers: they gossiped about people who were not there.

This woman was probably being shunned by the townspeople, so she went when nobody else would be there. She was totally startled when Jesus, a Jewish man, asked her, a Samaritan woman, for a drink of water.

Jesus said to her, ***"If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water."*** That struck a chord with her: ***"Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."***

Then Jesus said to her, ***"Go call your husband and come back."***

You can picture her getting very nervous, maybe looking down at the ground, and then saying softly, ***"I do not have a husband."***

Then Jesus looks into her heart and says, ***"You have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true."*** Notice that Jesus did not shun her. Nor did He dismiss her guilt like it wasn't anything of importance. But He saw in her someone who was loveable.

And then she changed the subject. Wouldn't we have done the same thing?

She said, ***"I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain. But you people say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem."*** Jesus listens, and then He says, ***"Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem."***

Notice: Jesus called her "woman." In our society that comes across rather rudely. If you are trying to call after somebody and you shout out, "Woman!" it doesn't sound right. We would expect "madam" or "ma'am" or "miss," but not "woman."

But in Jesus' day "woman" was a respectful title and could mean "special lady." "Special lady" – that's what Jesus called this person who had been shunned by the rest of the town.

Jesus called His own Mother Mary "woman" on two occasions in the Scriptures. There is the wedding feast in Cana, when they were running out of wine. He says to her, ***"Woman, how does your concern affect me?"*** On the cross, He says to Mary and John the Beloved Apostle: ***"Woman, behold your son. Son, behold your mother."***

"Special lady." That's the warmth with which Jesus treated that spurned Samaritan woman.

Then something powerful happens. She says, ***"I know the Messiah is coming… When He comes, He will tell us everything."*** Jesus says to her, ***"I am He, the one speaking with you."***

And then – and this detail is really neat – ***"the woman left her water jar and went into the town."*** One spiritual writer says that she might have left her water jar behind at the well as a ploy. It gave her an excuse to come back later. Have you ever done something like that: planted a reason for a return visit?

Well, she goes back into town and she blabs the whole thing to everybody. The astounding thing is that now people listen to her – the same woman that nobody had wanted anything to do with. She says, ***"He told me***

everything I have done. Could He possibly be the Christ?" And they follow her back to the well to meet Jesus.

Then the Samaritan people say to the woman who had been at the well, ***"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."***

Isn't that the point of the Gospel? I would venture to say that all of us, except for the tiniest of children, have messed up in life before, and probably more than once. We come to Jesus and, in His mercy, He forgives us – and He calls us His "special ones" – "special lady," "special gentleman," "special teen," "special child."

What does He expect us to do in return? To go out to others – like the Samaritan woman did – and tell them what the Lord in His mercy has done for us.

And we can tell them from our own experience: ***"There is certainly a place in Jesus' heart for you, because He has already made a place in His heart for the likes of me. He is truly the savior of the world."***

What command of Jesus are we following when we do this? The one we hear at the end of Mass: ***"Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord."***

And, thanks be to God, we do have something life-changing to announce and to share: ***"He is truly the savior of the world."***