

**Homily for March 23, 2003
3rd Sunday of Lent
Cycle A, RCIA, 1st Scrutiny
By Father Charles Bowes**

**Exodus 17:3-7, 28
Romans 5:1-2, 5-8
John 4:5-42**

Where we see darkness, God sees only light.

The woman said to Jesus, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” The disciples were astonished that he was speaking with a woman. Jesus said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, you would ask and he would give you living water.”

There is a dramatic contrast in this story among three points of view: the woman’s perception, the disciples’ perception, and the Lord’s perception. The woman initially sees Jesus as potential trouble. She’s probably already in hot water with the townspeople for too many relationships with too many men. Additionally, she is unaccompanied, which, even at a public well, could make her vulnerable to abuse by passing males. So she is suspicious of the out-of-towner who, because he is a Jew, is out of place at the Samaritan well.

The disciples are equally uncomfortable with the woman’s presence. Why is she hanging around? Why is Jesus talking to her? What does she want from us? Contact with any woman, especially one who is a Samaritan, could potentially render the men religiously impure and prevent them from entering the temple in

Jerusalem where they were headed in the first place.

So, while the woman sees Jesus as potential trouble and the disciples see the woman as potential trouble, Jesus sees the woman as pure potential - all positive. His vision for her is far more hopeful. He perceives that she has struggled her whole life to find fulfillment outside of herself, as was evidenced by the five husbands. His hope for her is that she will come to believe that what she is looking for is already alive in her. Believing that, she will no longer have to keep coming to the worldly well in search of life. The spirit of life will give her everything she desires - and that spirit is as close as her own heart.

That’s how God looks at each of us - as pure potential. We get so caught up with our weaknesses and our inabilities and failures. God doesn’t dwell on those things. God sees the child of God we each are and cherishes that. In fact, it is by naming and claiming our struggles and unloving choices that the very things we see as weaknesses become our strengths, our avenues, our ways in which God enters into our hearts and spirits. That’s the beauty of the penances we do during Lent - they put us in touch with our weaknesses. Even our failures in accomplishing those penances make us depend upon God, and that’s good news...that God can be God to us, and we can be God’s children. Who but

God could see the potential for water in a rock. Rocks that we are, God always sees the potential for good.

The poet Denise Levertov caught this spirit when she wrote:

“Don’t say there is no water.
...it is still there and always there
with its quiet song and strange power
to spring in us,
up and out through the rock.”

Where we see darkness,
God sees only light.