

Homily for the third Sun. of Lent.

March 14-15, 2008 "A"

When I was a kid, one of my jobs was to take care of the gardens at my dad's car dealership. Parts of the garden around the building never got rain, because the roof covered it. The soil was so dry that nothing would grow; it wouldn't even soak up the water. The water just sat there and eventually evaporated. But dad always wanted those places to be planted. And each year after a week or two, dad would have another collection of dead plants.

The woman at the well, at first, was like that dry soil. She was kind of a smarty-pants. She had an answer for each question Jesus put to her. She didn't want to hear Jesus' challenge to her but her life was like a dried up and shriveled plant. It took the Lord a while, but finally he was able to touch her heart, and his words began to penetrate. She eventually allowed his challenge to soak in. And the life-giving waters that Jesus spoke changed and softened her hard dry heart. From that moment on, she saw herself and the world in a new light.

This woman was really changed. She wasn't the cool suave sophisticated woman who sauntered up to the well at first. She ran away back to the village jumping and shouting she was so filled with enthusiasm.

But at first she was intractable. The words of Jesus would not soak in. The life giving water had no effect.

We can become untouchable by Grace like that woman. Even when we think that we are doing more than is required of us. Our pride can play tricks on us. That is why every once in a while it is necessary to step back and take an objective look at how we live our faith.

For example, having a deep faith in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and recognizing it as a precious gift is very important. That presence of Christ should inspire awe and gratitude because the Eucharist is not just bread and wine it is Christ really present, body, blood, soul and divinity.

But there is a danger of thinking as though God was imprisoned in the Host, or as though it were sort of a magical talisman. This danger comes about when we loose sight of the living Body of Christ, which the Host points us toward. Pride can disguise itself as piety, and the indication of this is when our hearts remain as intractable, unforgiving, judgmental and as dry as the soil that never gets rained on. We can become incapable of letting the Eucharist be that living presence which deepens our Communion with God or one another.

Our devotion to Jesus in the Eucharist must draw attention to our membership in the Body of Christ, and make us willing to share in that body's mission.

Jesus' presence in the Eucharist is meant to direct our attention to His presence in the world around us, and remind us that he is present in every man, woman, and child. It is in and

through these others that we should show our love for Christ. Anything less than that puts us in danger of idolatry.

We dishonor the Lord if His presence in the Eucharist draws us away from His presence in our neighbor.

The presence of Jesus saturates the whole *Church* with living water. Like the woman at the well, we have to allow the living word of God to saturate us so that our lives become the tools by which the Kingdom of God is proclaimed.

What good does it do us if we are taken up in rapture at the sight of the consecrated Host, yet fail to be moved with compassion for our brothers and sisters? What kind of faith is it, which moves us to our knees in the presence of the Host, yet allows us to ignore or be rude to the stranger in our community?

St. John Chrysostom writes; "Christ chose to be present to us in the Eucharist to bring us to a closer bond of friendship, and to signify his love toward us, giving Himself to those who desire Him, not only to behold Him, but also to handle Him, to eat Him, to embrace Him with the fullness of their whole heart. Therefore as lions breathing fire do we depart from that table, rendered objects of terror to the devil".

The woman at the well left the presence of Jesus like a lion breathing fire, proclaiming to all she met her faith in Jesus. Let us pray that the life giving water we receive at this table of the Lord; will give us the courage to proclaim the presence of Jesus in our midst, and the compassion to see his face in each other.