

3rd Sunday of Lent - Cycle A – Woman at the Well – Nativity Anew II (2008)  
Exodus 17:3-7; Romans 5:1-2,5-8; John 4:5-42

Jesus, tired and thirsty from his journey, sat by himself at a secluded well. His weariness and his thirst remind us of his humanity. Just like us, Jesus also felt the limitations of his physical needs. Like Jesus, we sometimes grow weary from the journey, and weary for the demands of life, and we simply need time alone.

A woman came to him who also had a thirst. Unlike our physical need for water, her thirst went much deeper for hers was a spiritual thirst. Coming by herself, in the full heat of the midday sun, gives us a hint about her. Her spiritual thirst came from the fact of her troubled life: married and divorced five times, and now simply living with another man. This alone had distanced her greatly from God. Then there would have been the onslaught of gossip and judgmental looks she received from others. It was just easier to come to the well alone.

At that well that day her life was changed forever. Jesus read her heart and gave her the one thing we all desire, God's mercy and grace. With that her heart was changed as she received the life-giving waters of the Holy Spirit that welled up inside of her. Filled with that grace she went back to the others, those very people who had judged and ridiculed her, and brought them to meet the man who, "told her everything she had ever done." She became a disciple who brought them to Jesus.

Each week we come to this place tired and thirsty from our walk with Christ. We come here with our anxieties and fears, our sins and failures. We come here with the assurance that we will receive the refreshment we need to continue our walk of faith. Entering this place we recall first our baptism as we dip our hands into the waters of rebirth and bless ourselves with the sign of our salvation. We are then fed with the life-giving words of the sacred scriptures, and the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist. Like the woman at the well, we go forth from this place to invite others to meet the one who knows everything we have ever done.

In this parish we are blessed to have extraordinarily rich symbols of our baptismal faith in which life-giving water flows forth from the rock of our baptismal font. We then are fed, under the shadow of the cross, at the altars of the word and the Eucharist. These rich symbols of faith: our baptismal font, ambo, altar, and crucifix, are here today because eight years ago you took a leap of faith to move this parish towards the next step of our growth in Christ. You called this experience "Nativity Anew."

In Nativity Anew you were able to retire a debt that had burdened the parish for forty years. You also were able to finish this worship space, as was intended from the time it was built, as well as establish a Social Justice Endowment Fund to continue the strong mission of justice that has been in the parish since its founding days. So successful was this campaign, we also now have over \$300,000 in a building fund for future repairs and projects.

At that time the planners came up with a sort of master plan that addressed what was believed to be our parish needs. Part of the dream was the idea of increasing the size of our school to increase enrollment, as well as providing additional office space and addressing other problematic issues in our physical plant. A Master Plan was developed that would have cost nearly \$12 million to accomplish.

Prudently you made the decision to embark on a \$1 million campaign to accomplish the three goals of Nativity Anew. These improvements have served you well and a new life has been breathed into this community.

Today, due to the generous promise of \$1,000,000 from Ron and Marlene Hoffart, we have the possibility of realizing more of the initial dream. Since last February a group of people has been meeting to continue studying our parish and looking at the possibilities of what we could do as a next step. Simplifying the Master Plan, which included also the idea of putting a roof over the entire courtyard, brought the dream down to almost \$7 million. Knowing this was still an unattainable dream we continued studying and planning what we might do.

Today, I am proud to announce to you that we have come to a very reasonable and realizable plan for a building project. To accomplish this we will be embarking on a \$3.5 million dollar capital campaign. This campaign does include the pledge of \$1 million so we need to raise only an additional \$2.5 million.

The goals of this money address four serious issues we have with our present physical plant. This first \$1.5 million will be spent to upgrade our entire educational center; in other words the entire 1960s portion of our building. It is time once again to replace the entire roof. We also need to replace the windows and the 47 year old boiler system. We also need to improve and bring up to code our fire suppression and alarm systems and tighten up the security of our building to protect our children and teachers.

Secondly, through the years we have been able to increase the number of our staff members that serve our parish in the many and varied programs available. Finding office space has always been a challenge and as a result our staff is scattered in five different locations in our building. We plan to build a new administrative center that will house many offices for our parish staff members, as well as a suite of offices for our school. This will also accomplish a much needed security issue in that our staff will be able to see and monitor all people as they come to and from our building.

This leads to a third need that will be addressed, which has to do as much with security as it does with hospitality. We plan to build a new entryway, visible from the parking lot, through which we can direct all people who come to our parish. Currently people can simply walk in from many different ways, and they do, and as a result are often lost and confused as to where to go in our building. This single main entry should help us to be a more welcoming parish to the stranger, as well as providing for a more efficient use of our building.

Related to this is the plan to enclose a small portion of the courtyard for a gathering space. Our current foyer is not big enough to accommodate the large numbers of people who come to and from our masses. I have noticed that most people coming to mass simply come and go as quickly as possible, partly to make room for others. We can improve greatly what it means to be "one community of faith" by providing for the possibility of more community interaction before and after our worship. This would also provide a space for people to linger and talk with one another outside of our worship space so that those who wish to come before or stay after mass for additional prayer could do so with less distraction.

We are calling this campaign “Nativity Anew II” because we believe it truly is a continuation of the dream first dreamt with Nativity Anew. This campaign officially commences with a “Kickoff Celebration” that will be held on April 6<sup>th</sup> here at our church. It culminates with “Commitment Weekend” on May 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup>.

We are asking you to do three things at this time.

- 1) Please pray for our campaign's success. Success depends not only on your willingness to get involved and give, but also on God's initial and continual guidance and grace.
- 2) Please prayerfully consider becoming a volunteer. Over 325 individuals or households are needed to assist with the campaign in a variety of capacities. I am pleased to announce that Maurice and Joy McCormick, and Kevin and Brenda Wolf, have graciously agreed to serve as our Campaign Chairpersons. Bruce and Terri Dahl have agreed, once again, to guide us in prayer as Prayer Committee Chairpersons. Dorothy Thiesen has agreed to be our hospitality committee chair, and Paul Leier has agreed to chair our Creative Giving committee. These people may be calling you in the weeks to come to assist us in our efforts. Please consider saying yes to this call.

To assist them we have included in your pews today a “Volunteer Willingness Card” that I would ask you to complete and turn in if you are willing to volunteer in any way. Please drop these cards in the basket along with your offering for today's mass.

- 3) Finally, you eventually will be asked to support the campaign effort financially. There are a variety of ways you may be able to make a contribution. Generally we are looking at a pledge commitment payable over the next three years. Please remember also, whatever amount you pledge needs to be over and above what you already generously give to our parish in your weekly offering.

This is an exciting time to be a part of Nativity Parish. Embarking on such a venture in the first year as your new pastor is not something I ever would have planned. I am simply helping to lead you in the vision that began before I came. In the time I have been here the entire planning process has gone so smoothly that I believe this is something God wants us to do. God has blessed us with a beautiful physical plant that has served us well. God has blessed also with a Catholic parish that truly is one of a kind.

The Church of the Nativity is alive and well and filled with the life-giving graces of the Holy Spirit. Like the woman at the well, we have received and been nourished by the graces poured forth from our sacraments. I truly believe that Christ is calling us to this next step on our journey with him. As we walk on with Christ, in Nativity Anew II, let us do so trusting that wherever we go, he will lead us, and guide us in the ways of holiness.

Please take a moment now and complete the volunteer cards found in the pews.