3rd Sunday of Lent

"The woman left her water jar and went into the town."
John 4:5-42

There is a small detail in today's Gospel that is easy to miss, but it may be the most powerful moment in the entire story. After the Samaritan woman encounters Jesus at the well, St. John tells us simply: "The woman left her water jar and went into the town." She came to the well carrying that jar… and she left without it. That jar was not just a container for water. It represented her whole life. In the ancient world, a woman's water jar was part of her daily survival. Every day she carried it to the well. Every day she filled it. Every day she carried it home again. It was heavy, ordinary, repetitive work. The jar represented the burden of daily life — the routines, the exhaustion, the responsibilities that never seemed to end. But for this woman, it meant even more. Notice when she comes to the well. She comes at noon, the hottest time of the day. Most women went to the well in the morning together, when it was much cooler. But she went to the well alone, which tells us that she was avoiding people. She was avoiding the whispers, the looks, the judgment. Her jar carried more than water. It carried shame. It carried loneliness. It carried the weight of her past.

And many of us know exactly what that feels like. Some of us are carrying jars of grief — losses that never fully leave us. Some carry jars of disappointment — the life we thought we would have but never did. Some carry jars of guilt, regret, or wounds that others inflicted upon us. Some simply carry the exhaustion of trying to keep going when life feels overwhelming. We carry them every day — quietly, faithfully, sometimes painfully. The Samaritan woman came to the well expecting nothing more than another ordinary day of carrying her jar. But instead, she encountered Jesus. Notice what Jesus does. He does not begin by condemning her. He does not begin by lecturing her about her past. He begins with a request: "Give me a drink." The Son of God places Himself in a position of need before her. He sees her. He speaks to her. He listens to her. For perhaps the first time in a long time, she is not treated as a problem, or a scandal, or a failure. She is treated as a person — a beloved daughter of God.

Then Jesus speaks words that go straight to the deepest thirst of her heart: "Whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst." He is not speaking about the well in front of them. He is speaking about the deeper thirst every human heart carries — the thirst for love, for mercy, for belonging, for peace. And suddenly something changes in her. The woman who came hiding at noon becomes the woman who runs back to the town proclaiming Christ. In that moment John tells us she left her jar behind. The jar she needed for water. The jar she carried every day. The jar that symbolized her burdens. She left it there. Because when she encountered Jesus, she realized something: what she thought would satisfy her thirst could never quench the deeper thirst within. Christ had given her what the water of that well never could — life for her thirsty soul. He gave her dignity. He gave her mercy. He gave her a new beginning.

And that is what Jesus still does today. Many of us arrived at church today carrying our jars — heavy jars, painful jars, jars full of worry about the future or wounds from the past. But the Lord we encounter here — in His Word and in this Eucharist — is the same Lord sitting beside that well. He sees the jar you carry, and He does not ask you to pretend it isn't heavy. He simply says, "Come to me." When we truly encounter Him, something remarkable begins to happen. Little by little, grace by grace, we discover that we can set the jar down. And when we do, we begin to walk away lighter — not because life suddenly becomes easy, but because we are no longer carrying the weight of our hearts alone.