

The Samaritan Woman at the Well
Third Sunday of Lent A
18-19 March 2017

INTRODUCTION

This homily on Shame this weekend is the last in a series of six homilies on Blocks to Belonging to the Family; you can read or listen to the other homilies on our website. Now Fr. Bruno and the Deacons will have a chance to preach for a while; they've been very patient!

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GUILT AND SHAME?

GUILT	SHAME
"I made a mistake."	"I AM a mistake."
"I committed a sin; I acted against God's Law."	"I am a horrible person because of what I did. I am worthless."
Holy Spirit convicts of sin by stinging our conscience. Guilt is good because it motivates people to repent from their sins after they have done them. It makes us feel bad because something is wrong. Hand on stove. Guilt moves people to repair the harm they have caused.	Devil accuses.
feeling bad about what you have done.	shame is feeling bad about who you are.
Debt	Embarrassment, feeling exposed, vulnerable.
Transgression	Disgrace

DEFINITIONS OF SHAME

- When you experience shame, you can feel isolated and alienated and cut off from others. It is a block to Belonging to the Family of God.
- Shame is an inner voice that insists that we hate ourselves...shame wants to make us believe that there is something wrong with our core identity—that we are worthless.
- Shame acts as a cover over the heart, as a shield, as a wall topped with razor wire, to protect it from further hurt...but these walls also block Jesus from entering that broken heart so he can heal it. First, a word about the significance of Jacob's Well, the setting for today's Gospel.

JACOB'S WELL

- Any pious Jew at the time would have associated wells in the OT with Marriage: Jacob himself, Isaac, Moses, and others all found their wives at wells.
- So now, Jesus, Almighty God, is the Divine Bridegroom searching for his Bride once again. And he doesn't pick the beauty queen. He picks the outcast; the damaged goods, the woman who feels dirty and shamed. He picks the Samaritan Woman with five husbands!

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN: TRIPLE OUTSIDER

- You could say that the Samaritan woman is a triple outsider:
 - For a man to speak to a woman publicly at the time was unheard of. It would be considered a violation of the law and a major blemish on his reputation if a rabbi like Jesus was seen talking with a woman, much less a Samaritan woman. She must have been amazed when Jesus spoke with her.
 - She was a Samaritan. As you may remember, Jews hated Samaritans and vice-versa. They were considered half-breeds because they intermarried with the peoples of the five foreign nations planted in their land by their Assyrian masters. The five nations brought the worship of five false gods—five ba’als, which means “husbands”—into Samaria. So, the Woman personifies the infidelity of the nation of Samaria to God, the true and original ba’al or Husband.
 - She also committed serial adultery. Women would normally get water in a group. But this outcast comes at noon, the hottest part of the day, because that is the time she is guaranteed to not run into anybody. Her shame isolates her and cuts her off from community.
 - Notably, she travels an extra half mile to get water from Jacob’s well, to avoid other people, even though there was a water supply in her own town of Sychar.
 - Why did she travel all the way to Jacob’s well, intending to lug all that water back home each and every day? Maybe because the women of Sychar banned her from getting water at the well in Sychar. Or maybe she was just too shamed to show her face in public. We don’t know for sure.
- So, what causes her to be freed from her shame? She has a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. That makes all the difference in the world.

THE ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST THE BRIDEGROOM

The Vulnerability of the Sacred Heart

- Notice carefully **how** Jesus reaches out to the Samaritan woman in her shame.
 - Outcasts are just the kind of people Jesus loves spending time with the most.
 - Finally, perhaps for the very first time in her life, she finds a man with kindness in his eyes who did not shame her or use her or abuse her. He calls her to come near, not to stay far away. He calls her to an intimate conversation.
 - And the way Jesus—Almighty God—brings about conversion in her heart is by being vulnerable with her. She shows her what’s on his Sacred Heart. He opens up. This draws her out of herself. And this is risky for Jesus, because by doing so, he risks being rejected and wounded yet again. But he is willing to take the risk, because she is worth it.

- The power of his vulnerability calls her out of her shame with a gentle power: he simply asks for a drink, a pick up line that has been used before, I imagine.

The Promise of A Gift: Living Water

- Jesus then begins to talk about a gift that he wants to give her, the gift of living water: “whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst.”
- In the human heart there is a thirst that only Jesus can satisfy. In every person there is this nameless unsatisfied longing, vague discontent, a something lacking: a thirst for the divine.
- His kindness helps purify her desires so gradually, so gently, without any hint of manipulation that she is moved to desire to receive the gift he offers.
- The upshot is: Jesus doesn’t get her to leave her former life of sin by shaming her or commanding her; he draws out her desire for conversion by identifying and intensifying her thirst for the truth.

The Truth Will Set you Free

- Accordingly, Jesus speaks the truth, and he speaks it boldly: “You have had five husbands and the one you are living with now is not your husband.” (Telling the truth to someone that they are sinning is not shaming...it is a spiritual work of mercy called “admonishing the sinner.”)
- Now, when she finally sees herself in the person of Christ, she may have been shocked at what she recognized. No person ever really sees himself as he really is, warts and all, until he sees himself in the person of Christ. By doing this, Jesus awakens in her a thirst for God to bring her out of her shame, because she can’t do this on her own.

HER RESPONSE

- In Jesus’ presence, her shame gradually melts away because he didn’t judge her or condemn her. In response to her reception of his identity through his face, his words, and heart, she begins to open her heart. The walls of shame that surround her lonely heart begin to fall.
- Since she personifies the nation of Samaria, and Jesus reveals himself not only as the Messiah, but also identifies himself with “I am” of the Burning Bush, as Almighty God, this story is an allegory of God the Bridegroom courting once again his unfaithful Bride, Samaria, back to himself. He invites her to faith in God once again.
- When people discover who Jesus is, when they personally encounter him, they discover their own true identity: “in the mystery of Jesus Christ, the mystery of man is made clear” (GS 22). Encounters with Jesus Christ heal shame.
- Jesus’ wooing of the Samaritan Woman are not directed to bringing the woman to even more shame, but he draws her first to believe in him, to trust in him, after which then she becomes aware of her guilt and repents...that’s how the Lord heals us from sin.

- She left her water jar and ran to tell others all about Jesus. We receive what God gives and then we feel strongly drawn to share it with others. Jesus Christ brings her back into community and as a result, the whole country starts to believe in him and be united under him. This very desire to tell others of her discovery killed in this woman the feeling of shame.

THE HEALING

- A key to overcoming shame...turning to God and repentance and an encounter with Jesus Christ. The Samaritan Woman's shame turned to joy when she encountered Jesus.
- Another key is embracing the truth and not denying it, but owning it, so that you can have intimacy with Christ.
- Have you committed a sin that you think is unforgiveable...a sin so horrible that not even God can forgive it? Abortion? Denying a feeding tube from a parent who could have benefited from that food? Rape? Incest?
- What are you ashamed of in your life? If you suffer from shame, would you pray with me for a minute?

PRAYER

"I'm so ashamed, Father God; I don't know what to do. Father, release the Holy Spirit into areas of shame in my life. [Take a minute to talk to him about what incidents shamed you.] What do I need to understand about the shame—what do you wish to teach me through it? What do you want to heal? Show me what I need to know. I give you permission to heal me."

If I feel shame for a mortal sin I committed, I repent of the sin and ask forgiveness and will go to Confession if I haven't gone. I can't heal myself, Lord; I can't be an island unto myself anymore—it is too isolating; my shame says I am cut off, but I know that I crave community and connectedness to you and to other people. I know that you want me to belong to your family. Receive me back, Father."

Imagine the Father saying to you, "I unbind you from the shame of the past. Even now my tenderness is healing the area that feels so unloved, so unwanted, and unprotected. Receive my peace."