

Retreat - March 5, 2011

OPENING PRAYER

O God, you are our life, our very being, our peace and our joy.
You are our hope, our wealth and our strength.
We come before you at this new moment in your time.
O God, you are our home, our place of rest, our heaven, our salvation.
You are the source of all the work of our hands,
Of all the gifts of what has been,
Of all the opportunities of what will be.
Keep us, O God, in your grace.
Antiphon: My body rests in you, O loving God.

God, calm us into a quietness that heals and molds our longings and passions, our wounds and our wonderings into a more holy and human place.

Gracious and Holy One, I come to you full of much that clutters and distracts, stifles and burdens me and makes me a burden to others. Empty me of gnawing dissatisfactions, of anxious imaginings, of nagging prejudices, of old scores to settle and of the arrogance of being right.

Empty me of the disguises and lies in which I hide myself from other people and from my responsibility for my neighbors and for the world. Hollow out in me a space in which I will find myself, find peace and a whole heart, a forgiving spirit and holiness, the springs of laughter, and the will to reach boldly for abundant life for myself and the whole human family.

O God, gather me now to be with you as you are with me. Soothe my tiredness; curb my aimlessness; relieve my compulsiveness. Let me be easy for a moment. Release me from the fears and guilt, which grip me so tightly; from the expectations and opinions which I so tightly grip, that I may be open to receiving what you give, to risking something genuinely new, to learning something refreshingly different.

Forgive me for claiming so much for myself that I leave no room for gratitude; for confusing exercises in self-importance with the acceptance of self-worth; for complaining so much about my burdens that I become a burden myself; for competing against others so insidiously that I stifle celebrating them and receiving your blessings through their gifts.

Keep me in touch with myself, with my needs, my anxieties, with my angers, with my pains, with my brokenness-that I may claim them as my own rather than blame them on someone else.

O Lord, deepen my wounds into wisdom; shape my weaknesses into compassion; gentle my envy into enjoyment, my fear into trust, my guilt into honesty. O God, gather me to be with you as you are with me

My body rests in you, O loving God.

Reading

We all have a pile of resolutions in the back of our mind. At the beginning of Lent these are the ones that we usually pull out. Maybe we would do better to put those aside and find out what God has in mind. It may be something we had never thought of, something that surprises us.

Jesus said to his disciples, "Come by yourselves to an out-of-the-way place and rest a little." ... So Jesus and the disciples went off in the boat by themselves to a deserted place. (Mark 6: 31 – 32)

Song

**Quietly, peacefully let me rest in you.
Quietly, peacefully lead me back to you.**

In my weakness I have strayed, drifting far from you.
In your goodness steady me, light my path to you.

Loving wisdom, you alone know how I can be
You, the hope my spirit seeks, come and set me free.

Breathe your law deep in me, plant it in my soul.
Let your justice be my song, kindness be my goal.

Happy is the heart that's free, choosing life with you.
Break the chains that bind my soul, let me walk with you.

Closing Prayer

God of our healing and our wholeness, renew and recreate us in your truth. Let this time of being with you, with ourselves and with each other, bring nourishment, refreshment, and new life to our hearts and spirits. Help us to become more aware of what we need to let go of and what we need to embrace. May we come to an ever deeper appreciation of the unique and wonderful work of art which You- the Artist of each soul---created us to be. We offer this prayer in the name of Jesus your Son who died that we might live life to the full. Amen.

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## First Reading and Discussion

### *The Transfiguration - Matthew 17: 1 – 8*

1. After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2. And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. 3. And behold. Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with him. 4. Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. 5. While he was still

speaking, behold, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them, then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." 6. 'When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid. 7. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and do not be afraid." 8 And when the disciples raised their eyes, they saw no one else but Jesus alone.

### ***Questions for thought on the Transfiguration***

What have been your times of Transfiguration? Relive one of your experiences. Savor once again the sense of God's love for you and God's presence in your life. What does that experience mean for you now?

If this is a difficult time for you right now, consider the small, maybe subtle, moments where God is offering you encouragement. How is God doing this?

### **Reflections from Sister Mary Anne on the Transfiguration**

The gospel for the second Sunday of Lent is the Transfiguration. It may seem surprising to you that the Transfiguration is proclaimed on the second Sunday of the most penitential season of the Church's liturgical year. To understand its significance in the season of Lent, we need to put it into the context of the synoptic gospels. For Matthew, Mark and Luke, this event takes place as Jesus and his disciples are making their way to Jerusalem. Jesus has a sense of the violence that lies ahead of him in Jerusalem. The disciples do not. And so as they travel, Jesus tries to prepare them for what will come. Three distinct times on the way Jesus predicts his upcoming passion, death and resurrection. The disciples either deny the truth of what he says or just do not get what he means. The Transfiguration event is told in the midst of these predictions in order to bolster the faith of both Jesus and the disciples and to be a source of strength, courage and encouragement to them as they enter into Jesus' passion and death. I would like to relay the experience of the Transfiguration from two perspectives. First, from Jesus' perspective and then from the perspective of Peter, James and John.

What was the experience of the Transfiguration like for Jesus? As I said he was becoming increasingly aware that his life was going to end in violence, as did many of the prophets before him. This is not mentioned in Matthew's gospel which is Cycle A but in Luke's gospel it states that Jesus took Peter, James and John up onto the mountain to pray. In his time of prayer on the mountain was he telling his beloved Father that he was feeling all alone, that no one, even his closest apostles, understood what was about to happen? We do not know but in this prayer experience on the mountain, God intervenes in Jesus' life in a startling and profound way. God's divinity suffuses Jesus. God lets his divinity shine through the humanity of Jesus. His face became as dazzling as the sun, his clothes as radiant as light. God also sends Moses and Elijah to converse with him. Both Moses and Elijah also had mountaintop experiences that they could share with Jesus. Did they also converse with Jesus about his upcoming passion and death offering him encouragement?

In the Old Testament the presence of a cloud was a sign of God's presence. (In the desert, loud by day, fire by night) A cloud descends on the mountain and out of the cloud came a voice, God's voice, which says, "This is my beloved Son on whom my favor rests. Listen to Him." Do these words sound familiar? The first part of the revelation is the very same words that God

spoke to Jesus at his Baptism, affirming Jesus' belovedness to God. Jesus would remember his Baptism experience in great joy. How comforting and strengthening that would have been to Jesus. It was as if God were saying to him, "Remember this as you endure your passion and death. Passion and death are not all there is. Resurrection will follow. My love will overcome even death." What a source of strength and courage and hope for Jesus to remember and to return to in the midst of his passion.

What was this experience of Transfiguration like for Peter, James and John? God knew that Peter, James and John also needed something to hold on to, some experience that they could remember when they witness the reality of Jesus' passion. To respond to their needs, to encourage them for all that would lie ahead, God let his divinity shine through the humanity of Jesus. The disciples beheld for the first time the splendor of God shining on the face of Jesus, their beloved rabbi and friend. Faithful followers of the God of Israel and knowledgeable of the Hebrew Scriptures, Peter, James and John would have known that both Moses and Elijah had their own mountaintop experiences. In Exodus 24, God invited Moses to Mt. Sinai where the glory of the Lord settled upon him. The prophet Elijah, fleeing from his enemies, took refuge on the same mountain and God appeared to him in "the tiny whispering sound."

The three apostles are awestruck at what they are witnessing. In probably nervous and frightened words, Peter's spontaneous response is to want to stay there and erect three tents, one each for Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Can he be blamed for wanting to stay in this awesome, otherworldly, unconditionally loving experience?

While Peter is still speaking, the God of infinite love speaks from a cloud above, "This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." Was God trying to help the disciples to listen to Jesus' prediction of his passion, death and resurrection, to see that this was a reality that they had not even been able to entertain? Was Jesus' shining face and his dazzling white clothes signs to let them know something of the mystery of Jesus when, after his passion and death, his divine nature would be revealed? Their response was one of awe and fear and they fell forward on the ground. Passed out? Soon Jesus came to them, laid his hand gently on their shoulders and said, "Get up. Do not be afraid." When they looked up, they did not see either Moses or Elijah or hear God speaking from the cloud. Jesus alone was present to them. Jesus, confirming for them that the experience was real, instructed them not to tell anyone of the vision until he had arisen from the dead.

Ultimately the Transfiguration is a promise of resurrection, the promise of a loving and faithful God to Jesus and to the three apostles that death is not the end of everything, that resurrection always follows death. Hopefully all of them would recall this mountaintop experience in the midst of the horror of Jesus' passion and death.

How does this story of the Transfiguration touch our own lives? Two responses come immediately to mind. The first is an Ignatian principle: When we are in desolation, recall our times of consolation. In the midst of our pain and suffering, in those times when God no longer feels present to us and seems to have abandoned us, we are urged by Ignatius of Loyola to reflect on those times in our past when we have enjoyed God's abundant love and God's abiding presence. Ignatius tells us to remind ourselves that God is as loving and as present to us in our

suffering as he was present in our times of consolation. We may not feel it but in faith we know it to be true. Hopefully, Jesus and the disciples remembered their Transfiguration experience in the midst of Jesus' passion and death and hopefully it provided strength, reassurance and some comfort to them.

The second connection is that the Transfiguration urges us to look for the moments of God's love, presence and encouragement in the midst of our pain and suffering. The Transfiguration happened in the midst of the three predictions of the Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. Our moments may be small and/or subtle, unlike the Transfiguration, but knowing God's encouragement to the disciples, we can look for ways that God is encouraging us to hold on. Maybe we will find God's encouragement in the compassionate support of family and friends. Maybe it will be in the power of the faith community who is praying for us. Maybe we experience God strengthening us through our own personal prayer and the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. Maybe it is as simple as a phone call or an email from someone who is thinking about us and is concerned about us.

In your time of quiet prayer this morning you may want to reflect on your own moments of Transfiguration, those times when you had a deep sense of God's love and presence in your life. You may want to savor again the joy, the freedom and the encouragement those times of consolation brought you.

If this is a difficult time for you, a time of darkness, a time of suffering, you may want to consider the small, maybe subtle moments of Transfiguration where God is encouraging you to hold on, to endure, where God is giving you what you need to live each day, aware of his power and presence in your life.

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## **Second Reading and Discussion**

### ***Man Born Blind – John 9: 1-41***

1 As he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. 2 And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him. 4 We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." 6 As he said this, he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the man's eyes with the clay, 7 saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam " (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing. 8 The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar, said, "Is not this the man who used to sit and beg?" 9 Some said, "It is he"; others said, "No, but he is like him." He said, "I am the man." 10 They said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" 11 He answered, "The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash'; so I went and washed and received my sight." 12 They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." 13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14 Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. 15 The Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." 16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" There was a division

among them. 17 So they again said to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet." 18 The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight, 19 and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" 20 His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21 but how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself." 22 His parents said this because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. 23 Therefore his parents said, "He is of age, ask him." 24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, "Give God the praise; we know that this man is a sinner." 25 He answered, "Whether he is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see." 26 They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you too want to become his disciples?" 28 And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." 30 The man answered, "Why, this is a marvel! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. 32 Never since the world began has it been heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." 34 They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out. 35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of man?" 36 He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" 37 Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to you." 38 He said, "Lord, I believe"; and he worshiped him. 39 Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." 40 Some of the Pharisees near him heard this, and they said to him, "Are we also blind?" 41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.

### ***Questions for thought on the Man Born Blind***

What does it mean to me that Jesus is "The Light of the world"? When have I been called upon to give witness to my belief in Jesus? How did I respond?

When have I acted like the Pharisees, unwilling to allow a new revelation of God to come into my life because I was so sure that I already possessed the whole truth?

What "blindness" would like to ask Jesus to cure in me?

### **Reflections from Sister Marie Michele on Man Born Blind**

(Jesus, the Light of the World)

Background on John:

- Irony – words have several levels of meaning – blindness
- Dialogues – Jesus words are not always understood at first on the surface; this leads to deeper levels of meaning
- Symbolism – spiritual significance is attached to routine happenings and deeper meaning of events

The Book of Signs: Only 7 miracles recorded in John

This story is about Jesus, the Light of the world and the contrast between the miracle of sight for the blind man and the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees.

As sheer drama this scene is one of the most brilliant passages in the gospel – rich in the irony of which John is the master.

The one-time beggar stands before his betters to be badgered into denying the one thing of which he is certain. But the real defendant is Jesus and when the blind man is “cast out”, it is Jesus who is rejected.

Note: the Christian enlightened in Baptism can be called upon to confess Jesus before others. “As Jesus walked along” in Jerusalem ... The disciples asked why was the man born blind – who sinned? Jesus doesn’t respond to this question as the disciples (and we) might wish. But Jesus indicates that this is an occasion for the work of God\*. Jesus identifies himself with his role in fulfilling the divine purpose. For John, the essence of this sign/miracle is not simply that sight is restored, but that light is given to one who never had it.

\*Note: this is something to remember whenever we ask the why question in the face of pain or difficulty.

V6-7 Jesus spat and made mud and applied it to the man’s eyes (medicinal purposes) – the word for applied literally meant anointed. John intended this to be a Baptismal reference. Jesus sends the man to wash in the pool of Siloam. John sees significance in the name of the pool (sent) since Jesus is the one sent by the Father as the Light of the world and it is in the waters that the man receives his sight.

V 8-12 The words and deeds of Jesus cause dissension.

As usual, John has the man gradually progress in his understanding of Jesus – “man called Jesus” to “he is a prophet – one with a special relationship with God.

Pharisees first complaint is that Jesus violated the Sabbath; there is disagreement among the Pharisees over the healing.

V 18-23 The parents are questioned. They are careful not to offend. They don’t want to be “excommunicated”.

V 24 The Jews attempt to intimidate the man into condemning Jesus.

V 26 the man refuses to debate them; he is frustrated in repeating the story.

V 27-29 Now the man is fully aware of what the Jews are up to and makes no attempt at diplomacy: “Do you want to become one of his disciples, too?”

He reminds the Jews that Jesus is gaining more disciples in spite of their efforts. They claim allegiance with Moses and they don’t know where Jesus is from.

V 30-33 the man becomes bolder and gives the example to Christians who must testify fearlessly to the truth – logically Jesus must have come from God.

V 34 They can't refute him, so they throw him out.

V 35-41 John contrasts the willing faith of the blind man with the willful blindness of Jesus' enemies. Contrast between Jesus, the Light of the world and the blind guides who oppose him.

V 35 Jesus seeks out the blind man and offers the opportunity for the ultimate act of faith. Jesus had identified himself in a similar way to the Samaritan woman.

V 38 "Lord (the title of Christian faith) I believe."

V 39 the meaning of the entire cure is summed up by Jesus: the effect of judgment brought about by Jesus' call to faith is that many (like the Pharisees) falsely believe that they already have the light and reject any new revelation of God.

V 40-41 The Pharisees get the message – if only they realized the extent of their blindness, there would be hope that they would seek the light. What makes their case hopeless is their smug complacency.

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Third Reading and Discussion

Woman at the Well - John 4: 1 -41

1 Now when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John 2 (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), 3 he left Judea and departed again to Galilee. 4 He had to pass through Samaria. 5 So he came to a city of Samaria, called Sy'char, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. 7 There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." 8 For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. 10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." 11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?" 13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." 15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw." 16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." 17 The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly." 19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men

ought to worship." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." 25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things." 26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he." 27 Just then his disciples came. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but none said, "What do you wish?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" 28 So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city, and said to the people, 29 "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" 30 They went out of the city and were coming to him. 31 Meanwhile the disciples besought him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." 32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." 33 So the disciples said to one another, "Has any one brought him food?" 34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work. 35 Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest. 36 He who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. 37 For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' 38 I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor." 39 Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. 41 And many more believed because of his word. 42 They said to the woman, "It is no longer believe because of your word that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world"

Questions for thought on the Woman at the Well

For what do you thirst?

What did you notice about Jesus in this scripture passage?

What about this woman draws you? What about her repels you?

What sinful pattern in your own life do you struggle with and would like to open to Jesus' healing presence?

Facts and Reflections from Sister Mary Anne on the Woman at the Well

For the third Sunday of Lent, both the first reading and the gospel relay stories of people who are thirsty: thirsty for water but also thirsty for God. The Israelites thirst for water in the desert; Jesus offered the Samaritan woman living water, for which she was thirsting, though she was not aware of it. Water in the Scriptures is a symbol of life. The Israelites lived in a land surrounded by barren deserts and water constituted a question of life and death.

I had the privilege of studying scripture in Israel for three months. For the three months that I was there: from the end of August to the middle of November, it rained only once and it was just a drizzle. That is why wells, the underground sources of water were so important to the Israelites. During the rainy season which was between December and March, the ancient

Israelites collected the rainwater into cisterns for the dry months. We also saw a very elaborate aqueduct put in place by the Romans to get water from the North of Israel down to the South where Jerusalem was located. Water was and still is an extremely precious commodity. I also camped out in the Sinai Desert. Nothing is alive in the desert, not even insects. No living thing can survive without water. As we would be traveling along on the desert roads, occasionally we would see a bush. We knew that, somewhere, there had to be a source of water for that bush. Otherwise it would cease to exist. Water was a matter of life or death in Israel.

In the gospel, Jesus has an extended conversation with a Samaritan woman at a well. In John's gospel, water takes on a deeper meaning. It is God's life-giving presence. I would like simply to tell the story, being true to the scriptures but adding some possible thoughts and feelings of both the woman and Jesus. As I do so, please notice two things: the woman's thirst which eventually moves her to a conversion of heart and Jesus' way with her which gently invites her to make the change. And so to the story.

Jesus and his disciples are on their way back to Galilee from Judea. While the most direct route is through Samaria, most Jews detoured to the route along the far bank of the Jordan River in order to avoid the Samaritans whom they despised as "half-Jews" and unclean. Given the inclusiveness of Jesus' ministry, he would not even have considered that as an option. No one was outside the range of Jesus' love and care.

They had been traveling all morning and arrived at Jacob's well near the Samaritan town of Sychar around noon, in the heat of the day. They were strangers—Jews—whom the Samaritans would neither like nor welcome. The disciples went into the city to buy food. Jesus waited at the well. He was tired and weary and thirsty. Throughout Palestine, Jacob's well was known for its cool, sweet, refreshing water. Jesus anticipated a drink that would quench his thirst. Too late he realized the disciples, in their haste to find food, had taken the bucket and rope with which they always traveled. Resigned to his thirst, he sat on the stone that covered the opening of the well.

As he sat there, he watched a woman approach. She watched him watching her. Neither of them lowered their eyes. He was a Jew. For a Samaritan women, that in itself was enough to warrant suspicion and caution, although for her there was much more. The other women of the village journeyed to the well twice a day, early in the morning in the cool of the early dawn and again at sunset. These were women times, their only times to do what women like to do—meet, listen, share stories, laugh, weep, console one another. These were times for the other women in the village but not for this woman. They never spoke to her, and shot her swift, scornful glances when she passed their doors. So at noontime while the rest the village ate and rested, she would move swiftly, hurry to the well so that she could avoid their condemnation and judgment.

And now there was a man sitting in the space that was usually empty at this time of day. She could hardly believe her eyes. Jesus was drawn by her appearance. There was a hardness in her face. A calloused, worn look. A deep hurt that filled her eyes and seemed to kill all trust. Jesus was drawn more to her need than to the water. Not one to let law or social custom stand in the way of relating to others, Jesus pushed beyond the accepted customs of both Jews and Samaritans. He spoke to her. In those days men did not speak to women in public. "Give me a

drink,” he said with courtesy and kindness. She was surprised. No, she was shocked! This stranger had overstepped all conventional bounds. His request was not a demand; it was more like a question that was asked with respect for her. The woman could not remember the last time a man had spoken to her that way. No one had ever looked upon her so tenderly! Letting go of her whole range of snippy remarks, she responded by confessing her uncertainty about what he meant by his request.

“How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” Jesus sees in her a certain amount of openness, even the beginnings of a change of heart. He gives her a double challenge that ends in a promise. “If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” The challenges: First, recognize who he was; second, ask to be given living water. The promise: living water would be given to her as a gift of God. Even though she does not understand the nature of Jesus’ challenge and is also at this point unaware of her own spiritual thirst, she still wants to stay engaged with him. She responds, “Sir, you have no bucket and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?”

Jesus saw in this woman gifts and potential that she had never dared explore. His heart ached for her and he longed for what she could still become. But he had to reach beyond her doubts and defenses, beyond her bruised and battered self-esteem. And she had to move past where she was and recognize and confess her need. He explained again about the water that he offered—water, that, when consumed, would quench thirst forever and spring forth into eternal life. She took his words literally and asked for some of this water so she would never be thirsty or have to carry water ever again!

Jesus tries another approach with her. “Go, call your husband, and come back,” Jesus told her. “I have no husband,” she quickly answered. Jesus says gently, “You are right in saying ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands and the one you have now is not your husband,” The woman waited for the familiar rebuke about her sinful relationship, the one she heard regularly from all the townspeople, but there was no scorn or rebuke or ridicule in his voice. Jesus simply told her the situation as it was. Jesus’ ability to bring out into the light her past for which she felt shame and guilt moved something inside her. She felt no longer paralyzed by everything that had gone before. She was ready for repentance. Forgiveness was looking like a possibility. But unable to say this in so many words, she responded simply by saying, “I see that you are a prophet.” Then with intelligence and quick thinking, she moved to a safer topic for the moment. In so many words, she asked “Where is God? Where are we to find God: in Jerusalem or on Mt. Gerizim?” Jesus took her questions seriously and responded in a way that honored her. He spoke of a time when all will worship not in a place but in spirit and in truth. The woman hears and receives his words in an attitude of spirit and truth. She felt secure enough in Jesus’ presence to confess that she believed in the Messiah and, when he came, he would make all things clear. Then Jesus did an extraordinary thing: He revealed who he was to her! “I am he, the one who is speaking with you.”

The moment of awakening. She has been thirsty, thirsty for the truth and Jesus fills her with the living water of faith. She recognizes him, and in the knowing, Jesus’ challenges and promise to

her were realized. Jesus had said that if she knew who he was, she would ask for living water, and it would be given to her. Now she knew what he meant!

At this crucial point in the story, the disciples return. They are surprised to find him speaking to a woman but no one questions him. Jesus, the woman and the disciples knew the conversation had ended with their arrival.

The woman left her water jar and, as she turned toward the city, she turned away from her old life. She had a story to tell, a message to give, and an invitation to issue. Now that she had tasted living water and her spiritual thirst has been quenched, she must proclaim its goodness to others. The townspeople gathered around the woman whom they had scorned and isolated—the one with the questionable reputation. She seemed even more a stranger to them now as she hurried toward them. There was something about her that was different. She had changed. She was radiant. Enthusiastic. Convincing. She spoke with authority. Whatever had happened to her was powerful. They wanted to know all about it. “Come and see!” she said. “Come and see!” Following her lead, they went to the well to meet Jesus. Many of the people in that city believed in Jesus because of the woman’s witness. Jesus spent two days with them, and as might be expected, no human witness—including the woman’s—could ever compare to an encounter with Jesus himself. Through his words many more Samaritans became believers. How wonderful those two days must have been for her! She was no longer treated as an outcast; she was part of the community. She was no longer seen as a foolish female; she was a wise woman. We wonder what became of her. It is not too hard to imagine that she became a leader in the Christian community in Sychar and that she reflected often on that conversation with Jesus, how he seemed to know her heart and her thirst, how gently he dealt with her and how he awakened faith in her.

Notice the thirst of this woman. She did not even fully realize what she was thirsting for. Looking at the story from our perspective, we do. She was thirsting for God, thirsting for peace, thirsting for a return to a life of integrity. Somewhere along the way, she got off track and she was longing to return.

Notice how Jesus was with this woman. He saw beneath her hard surface, knew the thirst that was within her. Gently he drew her into conversation. Gently he offered her the return she desired. No harsh words nor stinging criticisms yet he spoke the truth of her life as it was. Jesus gives her the grace to stay with him in conversation and can tell from how she addressed him that she was open to the grace: First she calls him Jew, then Sir, then prophet. Only when he knew she was ready did he reveal himself as Messiah to her. She embraces this good news wholeheartedly and runs to announce it to her town of Samaria.

How does this passage relate to our life experience? Well we may not be public sinners, as this woman was, but if we are honest with ourselves and know ourselves well enough, we know we each have our own faults, our own sins, and our own failings.

The key to changing these sinful patterns is to stay in close touch with Jesus. Being with Jesus, spending time with Jesus, conversing with Jesus moves and shapes us toward a change of heart. We cannot change ourselves all by ourselves but being in the presence of Jesus, letting Jesus into our hearts and minds can change us. It will not happen in a single conversation as it did with the

Samaritan woman, but there is no doubt: it will happen. We cannot remain the same if we stay in the presence of Jesus.

Once in the presence of Jesus, how can our change of heart be facilitated? Simply by acknowledging the reality of our lives, of opening to Jesus those places in our heart in need of healing. This openness on our part gives Jesus the entrance he needs to move in and change us. I have known a person who in past years would fly off the handle at the least aggravation. I can witness to the power of Jesus' presence in her life. Not always, but now she is much more able to respond to aggravating situations with a calm which is of God. I know a person who has held a grudge against a family member for years and refused to speak to him. Through the power of prayer he has been able to forgive and ask for pardon. I know a person who harbored harsh judgments and negative thoughts about most of the people he knew. I have watched him mellow over the years as he has come to know God more intimately. I know a person who is fearful and frightened of her future. When the fear surfaces, she allows Jesus' words from the Scripture to enter her heart and mind, "Do not be afraid." It settles her inner spirit.

All of these persons struggled. All of these persons brought their sins and their failings to Jesus. None are perfect now but they are much more at peace than they have ever been before. And this is wonderful motivation for us who struggle with our own sins and weaknesses. Bringing them to Jesus can heal us and give us peace.

Fourth Reading and Discussion

The Raising of Lazarus - John 11:1 -45

1 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. 3 So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." 4 But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it." 5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So when he heard that he was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. 7 Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go into Judea again." 8 The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" 9 Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. 10 But if any one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." 11 Thus he spoke, and then he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awake him out of sleep." 12 The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." 13 Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. 14 Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead; 15 and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." 16 Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." 17 Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary sat in the house. 21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise

again." 24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" 27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world." 28 When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying quietly, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." 29 And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. 31 When the Jews, who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 Then Mary, when she came where Jesus was and saw him, fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled; 34 and he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus wept. 36 So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" 38 Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb; it was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. 39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." 40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. 42 I knew that thou hearest me always, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that thou didst send me." 43 When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." 45 Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him;

Questions for thought on the Raising of Lazarus

What do I learn about Martha and Mary and their relationship with Jesus around the incident of Lazarus' sickness and death?

To which of the sisters do I most relate? Why?

What do I learn about Jesus' relationship with all three siblings in this Gospel account?

How does my belief in the resurrection impact my life?

Facts and Reflections from Sister Marie Michele on the Death and Raising of Lazarus

The 7th and last of the Signs in John's Gospel

This miracle gave supreme proof of Jesus' life-giving power.

- It is a sign both of the final resurrection and the sign of the rising from sin to grace that takes place in the soul of the believer.

But first who are these people? Give background on the siblings.

V 2 Causes confusion – Mary anoints Jesus – out of chronological order.

Lazarus is sick – the sisters send a message – like Mary's "request" at Cana – their "request" is "implied".

Note: like Cana, Jesus initially seems to ignore the request, but the story ends in a manifestation of god's glory for those who believe.

Note: "the one whom you love" – Lazarus in John represents the Christian – the believer in Christ.

V4 To the observer it might appear that Jesus was making light of Lazarus' illness and the sisters' message – because, in fact, Lazarus was critically ill.

But as so often in John, there is a deeper meaning in Jesus' words. Not Death but the Glory of God will be served through this illness.

V 5-6 It was not lack of love that caused Jesus to delay – but what would be manifested in the end.

V 7-8 Finally, when Jesus decides to go, his disciples remind him of what is waiting for him and why they left there recently.

V 9-10 Jesus' answer resembles what he said in the story of the man born blind – Now is the time for his appointed work – before the darkness sets in.

V 11-14 Again John's play on words: sleep vs. death – the disciples are confused.

V 15 Jesus rejoices not at Lazarus' death, but for the occasion to confirm the faith of the disciples. The disciples, of course, already have faith but this passage, and indeed the entire Gospel bears the message for all Christians for all time. This is John's constant intention in placing these words in Jesus' mouth.

V 16 Thomas says more than he realizes. He is thinking of the present danger to Jesus in Judea and expresses his willingness to face it with him. But John intends Thomas' words to sum up the common destiny of all Christians – which is to be dead with Christ and alive with him in his resurrection – to be united with Jesus in the Paschal Mystery.

V 18-19 The sisters are "sitting Shiva"

V 20 Martha goes to Jesus, Mary stays home.

V 21-22 Martha recognizes Jesus' special relationship to God

V 23-24 Jesus tells her Lazarus will rise – resurrection was generally accepted by the Pharisees and other Jews of the day.

V 25 "I am the resurrection and the life" – Martha believes in the resurrection, but Jesus wants her to know that the power of this belief/truth is found in him.

V26 Since every believer already possesses true and eternal life, physical death will not be the end of the story.

V 27 Martha confesses her faith in Jesus, but has not yet been told that Lazarus will be raised then and there as a sign of this truth.

V 28-33 Martha goes to get Mary. We don't know why Jesus stays outside the village. Mary goes and repeats her sister's greeting.

V 33 Jesus responds with deep emotion.

V 34-36 The Jews rightly perceive Jesus' love for Lazarus, but they do not yet realize the measure of his love. The Jews don't express skepticism, but echo the sisters' wonderment.

V 37-38 Jesus is deeply moved at the need of performing this sign with all of its consequences. Note: the tomb was a cave with a stone rolled to close its entrance. Jesus orders the stone to be removed.

V 39 Practical Martha still thinks Jesus just wants to see his dead friend.

V 40 Jesus tells Martha that the truth in which she has placed her faith is now to be exemplified in what he is about to do.

V 41 "Father I thank you that you have heard me." Jesus has asked God to raise Lazarus from the dead.

V 42 "I spoke because of the crowd." – Jesus' visible and audible thanksgiving to the Father is necessary to bring out the truth that in his works he is not simply a man endowed with wonder-working power, but the very one sent by/from the Father of life.

V 43-44 Lazarus comes forth.

V 45-46 Some came to faith – others reported to the Pharisees.