

**Homily – Third Sunday of Lent / The First Scrutiny (Year A Readings)
San Fernando Cathedral – March 3, 2024**

My dear elect, today's readings give us much to reflect about your traveled journey, this moment, and your upcoming initiation as Christians, full members of God's People. The bottom line is that none of us is truly Christian until we are missionaries; until we accept that our being elect means being sent to announce the salvation we have received.

The five husbands of the Samaritan woman, in the gospel, are a metaphor for the false idols that take God's place in that region. They also represent our own attachment to anything that does not allow us to give God his rightful place in our lives. Jewish orthodoxy could not accept those who had perverted the traditions of their faith. They were self-righteous against Samaritans. However, Samaritans indeed mixed pagan practices with the worship of the true God.

Jesus had already firmly criticized the hypocrisy of the Jews, such as when he flipped over the merchants' tables at the Temple (Cf. Jn 2:13-22). He now wants to engage in dialogue with Samaritans. To the Samaritan woman, he represents contempt. But no one imposes an agenda on Jesus. God's mercy knows no boundaries. Jesus does not allow prejudice or human rivalries to divert Him from his mission.

The privilege of the chosen people is none other than the mission to make the true God known to everyone. The God that Jesus reveals is our merciful Father; the One who created everyone out of love, who keeps us alive, and who drives our hope. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. The peace Jesus brings is the fruit of justice, based on truth. He himself is the truth about God, and "God is love." (1 Jn 4:8). Jesus is the way to the Father. Jesus is the fullness of life. In Jesus, unity is restored between peoples whose divisions seemed impossible to resolve.

Presumably, both Jews and Samaritans worshiped the same God, praying like Psalm 42 says: *"As the deer longs for streams of water, / so*

my soul longs for you, O God. / My soul thirsts for God, the living God. / When can I enter and see the face of God?" (Ps 42). At times, in the walk of life we may feel tired and thirsty. It may seem like God does not listen to our prayer, as it happened to the people in the desert. In our anguish, we may even lose sight of God's love and dare to protest. Without realizing it, instead of being a source of comfort and hope, we can sometimes even contribute to confusion and division in our environments.

The Lord's encounter with the Samaritan woman is a model for the process of our own encounter with the God revealed in Christ Jesus. The Lord restores the true tradition of the chosen people. Through his encounter with the Samaritan woman, Jesus shows his disciples that the sacrifice God wants is our contrite and humble heart. The woman can see beyond her prejudices to recognize her Savior in Jesus.

The dialogue around Jacob's well reveals a God who comes out to meet those who seek and worship Him in spirit and truth. Unexpectedly, the woman encounters God's face in Jesus, who is the true fountain of living water, which gives eternal life and is materialized in Baptism. Jesus wants to dwell in the depths of our hearts, the true temple of God. There he wants to ratify the covenant of love with his people, a covenant of peace. That is the worship in which God takes pleasure.

Begotten in the Spirit of the God of love through Baptism, Christians reaffirm our unwavering hope (Cf. Rom). Pope Francis reminds us that, through Baptism, *"it is God who comes into us, purifies, heals our heart, makes us forever his children, his people, his family, heirs to Paradise."* Strengthened through Confirmation and fed with the Eucharist, Christians water the earth with a joyful flow they cannot contain. With our help, God wants no one to thirst. Each of us is called to be like the water of the rock in the desert, so that whoever sees us, finds the God who has saved us.

May Our Lady of Guadalupe make of you true missionary disciples.