

**3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent (1<sup>st</sup> Scrutiny)**  
**Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski**  
**March 20, 2022**

I love this time of year! With warming temperatures and recent rains (with more to come this week), in the next few days we can expect a veritable explosion of green all around us: Spring has sprung! This time of year helps us recognize how dependent we are on water; we just can't live without it!

But what if, rather than depending upon the periodic rains, the water so crucial to life was always present, always abundant, always alive? That's the symbol presented to us in today's gospel—living water. Natural waters come to us from outside of ourselves, but are soon spent. However, the "living water" that Christ gives originates from the very depths of our being, making the soul, not a basin for collecting water, but rather, a fountain from which that water gushes forth; ever fresh, ever living.

Two weeks ago, our catechumens—Andy, Caleb, Hannah, Kevin, Maiya and Matt, now known as the Elect—celebrated the Rite of Election right here at the Cathedral with Bishop Johnston. Now, their path of initiation takes a new turn. Its focus changes from one of formation to one of **purification and enlightenment**. For this they undergo the Scrutiny Rites. Today, we celebrate the first of three scrutines. The second and third scrutines will be celebrated the next two Sundays.

The scrutines are prayers for healing, for liberation, and for forgiveness which **all of us** offer on behalf of the Elect. Each scrutiny addresses sin in a different way. But while the scrutines deal with our acknowledgement of sin, their focus is on God's love.

The scrutines have a two-fold purpose:

- First, to uncover and then heal all that is "weak, defective, or sinful" in the hearts of the Elect, and
- Second, to strengthen all that is "upright, strong, and good."

In these rites, we ask God to assist our RCIA candidates to embrace the love of God; giving them strength against the power of sin.

Each scrutiny utilizes a different symbol to bind the spiritual reality with our material nature. Today's first scrutiny uses the symbol of living waters that quench our basic thirst; we heard this symbol unfold in today's gospel reading—the Samaritan Woman at the Well. The second scrutiny uses the symbol of light for our blindness; next week we'll hear the gospel reading of the Man Born Blind. Finally, the third scrutiny develops the symbol of the gift of the fullness of life; for this we'll hear the gospel reading of the Raising of Lazarus.

Our candidates have made an important choice in their lives: A choice to follow the Lord as disciples in the company of the Christian community. These final days of preparation before their baptism at the Easter Vigil involve us, as the Cathedral community, giving them the support they need to make this commitment.

Today's celebration of the first scrutiny welcomes God's presence into the lives of these Elect. It acknowledges the power of grace over sin; that power which was so clearly evident for the Woman at the Well.

As with the Samaritan Woman, our hearts are prepared for the infusion of Christ's living water by naming the sin in our lives and affirmatively rejecting its power over us. That's why Jesus told the Samaritan Woman to go get her husband: He confronted her with her sin. Jesus had aroused her mind and stirred her emotions, but he also had to touch her conscience, and that meant dealing with her sin.

During these next few weeks, we ask our Elect to ponder the significant issues in their lives. We ask them to name and confront sin. The conversion of the Samaritan Woman, and her townsfolk, was effected by the force of Jesus' word, by the receipt of life-giving water. And so it is with us and these Elect. To effect a similar conversion for these Elect, the Church turns to its practice of liturgical prayer, the Mass—the "source and summit of Christian life." The Mass is that pure, inexhaustible source of living water, from which all who thirst can freely draw the gift of God.

This life-giving water is a gift; a gift stemming from the Word of God as celebrated at Mass. In a few moments, let us, as the Cathedral community, fully join our voices with those of our candidates as we pray for God's blessing upon them.