

## Sunday Homily

**Title** Are We Catholic?

**Date:** March 8, 2026

**Sunday:** 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent (A cycle)

**Scripture:** John 4:5-42

**By:** Fr. Bob Schmitz

**Text:** When John wrote his Gospel, this event was shocking. My guess is that many turned their backs on Jesus that day. This woman was a Samaritan; Samaritans were the religious enemies of Jews. They worshiped the same God, but in different ways. So, they hated each other. Religious hatred is the most intense. Protestants and Catholics started warring in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century that lasted until the 20<sup>th</sup> in some places. But the religious dispute was not the only reason for the shock. A Jewish man could not begin a conversation with a woman unless her husband, her master, was present; a woman, almost like a slave, belonged to her husband. Jesus was violating the Law of Moses. People who followed traditional ways detested this encounter.

John the evangelist sets up his readers; he wants to blow our minds wide open, and, once open, to change the way people relate. First, recall the Beatitude: "Bless are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied." Then ask: Who is thirsty? Who asks for water? And who is hungry? Jesus had just sent his disciples into the neighboring town for food. Then Jesus asks for water. Jesus hungers and thirsts.

The reader should note that water is metaphorical in this passage. It is not H<sub>2</sub>O. Water symbolizes baptism. St. Paul gives us the best explanation of the impact of baptism and how it might change the way we relate. He said that baptism allows us "to think of ourselves as living for God in Christ Jesus." We live for God who creates EACH PERSON in God's own image; we live

in Christ who saves ALL HUMANKIND. Paul tells us that living for God in Christ Jesus brings on “newness of life” (Romans 6:1-11).

Elsewhere, Paul contrasts a first Adam to a second Adam. In the book of Genesis, the first Adam brought sin into the world. Adam’s sin was contagious. His son Cane sinned through violence, killing his brother Abel. Then, later, contagious sin divided people, setting one group, one tribe against another—that’s the meaning of the story of the Tower of Babel. Then, after detailing how sin became contagious, the author of Genesis begins history anew. God calls Abraham to begin salvation history. God started to restore harmony to humankind. At long last, came a second Adam, Jesus Christ. Christ moves us to overcome sin. In Him, we can think and relate differently. Baptized into Christ Jesus, we can live for God who placed His own image in each person. We can live in Christ who brings us newness of life.

One of the twentieth century’s finest theologians was a Frenchman, Henri de Lubac. He wrote a study on the idea of Catholicism. The ancient church celebrated this newness life and the new ways to relate. The new way led them to call the church *catholic*. We recite our belief in the *catholic* church in each of the two creeds we proclaim at Mass. Only after the Protestant Reformation did *catholic* mean one, particular religious institution among others. Only then, did Christians think of denominations. Before the Reformation, *catholic* was a word to acknowledge that God created each person in His image and that Christ saved all humankind. *Catholic* meant universal, all people in all places regardless of geography, ethnicity, or race. To be *catholic* meant to hunger and thirst for the restoration of the original harmony, the unity of God’s entire family.

*Catholic* is a mystical term, which means *catholic* is a spiritual force that influences the reality we live in. So, the number of Catholics does not make us *catholic*. The way the church spread around the world did not make us *catholic*. De Lubac wrote that the church was *catholic* in that upper room on the first Pentecost when only a few disciples had locked themselves in. We are *catholic* because our belief in one God means belief in the harmony of all peoples. And, because we believe our salvation includes the restoration of that harmony. De Lubac quotes St. Augustine. The great 4<sup>th</sup>-century bishop and theologian thought of humankind after Christ as a great choir, a chorus that has the entire world singing—a wonderful image.

Jesus was hungry and thirsty that day for a renewal of humanity, a world restored to its original harmony. Jesus could reach across religious disputes and across traditions that rendered male and female unequal. He could be brother to each person because he knew that God is Father of all. I know this new way of thinking and acting is difficult. The first Adam's sin that destroyed the harmony still haunts us. I don't know anyone who can open their hearts to all peoples, trying to understand and tolerate everyone, attempting to reach across all the divisions in the human family. But the second Adam, Jesus Christ, invites us to participate in the restoration of that harmony. He invites us into the waters of baptism and therefore into the newness of life that allows us to call ourselves *catholic*.