When we encounter the mercy and love of God, and set about to change our lives and the lives of one another, much like with the woman at the well who we meet in today's Gospel, an incredible transformation can happen - it just requires setting our hearts, minds and souls on the right path, and opening up our eyes to see what will really satisfy our deepest thirsts and longings.

Stan Brody, a Catholic man from Chattanooga, Tennessee, thought that possessions would make him happy. As a boy, he'd look up from the front steps of his modest home and marvel at the big homes that commanded attention along the towering ridge line of Lookout Mountain. He'd think to himself as a kid "those people must be rich," and he hoped someday it would be him.

That someday came. He would get a big house, new cars, vacations in Hawaii, when he became the sunglasses king of the southeast US, opening a number of stores in malls. He got married. But his marriage crumbled, and one day in 2007 he packed his clothes and moved out.

A few years went by and by 2012, he was driving a truck on the windy roads from to Memphis, a trip he'd do weekly. Memphis, where he moved to, is where he says his life of contrition, salvation and self-sacrifice began, his old life of materialism and unrepentant sin behind him. In his words he thought he was doing it all right, but he realizes he ended up on the wrong path.

In his old life, like the woman at the well, he made some bad choices. He had a liaison with a young woman and had two children with her. Her father Jay confronted him, but in the way Jesus confronts the woman at the well . . . with love. He handed him a copy of "The Diary of St. Faustina," and sought to save his soul.

His life to that point had been one of trying to forget the past; his parents' marriage crumbled as well, and he grew up aware of the tension, his parents divorcing when he was 5, and his father not involved in their lives. Stan played baseball through high school, but his father was never there. His mom was more religious, a Baptist, but he became disillusioned when he saw people in church on Sunday living less than saintly lives on

Monday. He used that as an excuse to focus on tangible things, like getting one of those homes one day he wanted as a child.

And he got it. By 2005 he became a sunglasses tycoon, opening retail shops in many malls, and had a 5,000 square foot home on 4 acres. His boys had everything they could want, and the house was full of stuff.

He met Gina, a fallen-away Catholic, during his business travels. She was half his age. He tried to hide things, telling lie after lie, leading a double life. He'd tell himself he was providing for his boys, but he knew deep down he wasn't there for them as he should have been. Now adults, he sat them down and honestly said to them: "I was there for you, but I wasn't there for you the way you needed me to be there. I gave you all these things, but you never saw me on my knees praying to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It was my responsibility to make sure you get to heaven. If you had seen me as a man of faith, maybe some of the trials and tribulations in your lives would have been different. But it's not too late."

Stan would go on and eventually have his first marriage annulled and marry Gina in the Church. But the journey there required a true conversion in his heart, a response to mercy.

Helping to facilitate this was Jay, who is Gina's father. who is a devout Catholic and part of *The Society of Divine Mercy*, where people pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy every hour of the day with 1,300 people in 33 countries a part of it. The group also shares prayer requests with one another. His devotion began when he discovered the *Diary of Sr. Faustina* when he worked as an insurance salesman, and his parish was lent a relic of Sr. Faustina. The priest at his parish put him in charge of organizing a Divine Mercy Novena leading up to the feast of Christ the King. It was at this time he had a powerful experience during Holy Communion where he felt Jesus say to him "help me repair the Body of Christ," and he took that as a way to get people to pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. And it was this experience with Divine Mercy that would also challenge him to live it out.

It was at this time his daughter had a second child with Stan; and Jay and his wife Pattie as grandparents were primary caregivers. It was a point of emotional paralysis for them that point, and he wasn't at a point where he

could welcome Stan into his home. But Jay says you have to not only proclaim your faith, but you also have to live it; Christianity is sometimes called the easiest faith to explain and the hardest to live. And Jay understood that. Praying about it and reflecting on Divine Mercy, he concluded that we are not to respond to sin with anger and animosity and retribution, but our only response can be love - for love is the only thing that heals.

Stan eventually decided he wanted to be a part of James and Paige's lives (his children with Gina). Jay tried to speak to Stan about God, but he was resistant at first. Then God took over. In Stan's words, "Jay saved my life. His response to me was the most powerful thing that has happened in my life. He just continued and continued and never gave up on me. It made me realize that I need God. Without Him, we're all nothing and life is just turmoil."

He began to attend Mass with the kids. He entered RCIA. And Gina who had not practiced her faith for years, returned to Mass after her daughter asked them to come. And he embraced the Chaplet of Divine Mercy as a part of his spirituality too, reflecting on Sr. Faustina's words hearing Jesus

say to her “I will stand between My Father and the dying person not just as the just Judge but as the Merciful Savior.” Those words helped him when he dealt with the loss of his parents within 5 weeks of each other, praying the chaplet at his father’s bedside.

He doesn’t specify how his business fell apart, but he eventually took a job as a gutter installer his friend offered him in Chattanooga, finally getting his life on track, becoming a father to his kids, getting married in the Church, and not just finding God but having that encounter with Jesus that set about a change in thinking and how he was living.

For Stan, the journey was anything but a direct path, and that’s true for many of us too. Life happens, and while most people don’t reject God, as the years go by, many people try to find substitutes for God in their life. Or, to put it in the way of our Gospel today, they keep going to wells to find water they think will satisfy their thirst, only to thirst for more and more, or to end up isolated and ultimately alone like the woman. But what is key is to realize the power of Jesus’ mercy. Stan realized something important - that God was there waiting for him, and when he finally came to God, he had to

start drinking the water that was offered to him by changing his life and growing in holiness.

So how do we do that?

For one, we remember God is already there waiting for us. The woman in the Gospel goes to the well, and Jesus is already there. He asks for a drink; not because He is thirsty for water, but it expresses the divine thirst for souls. It's not we who choose God first; it's God who chooses us first. So, a good starting point is realizing that God is trying to find us. No matter what we've done, God is always going to be there. This poor woman is an outcast; it's why she's alone there at the well rather than with other women or coming at a less hot time of the day. Others may have judged her and abandoned her, and she's made some mistakes, but here is this Jewish rabbi who would know as a Jew and a man not to associate with a Samaritan woman such as her. But God thirsts for her, like he does for you and me.

This leads us to a second takeaway: as God thirsts for us, we thirst for God, even if we do not know it. Stan got his house, his job, the life he

wanted - but he was never truly happy. Most people don't reject God outright; rather like Stan, they just become too busy to see him. But deep down, we long for God. That's what we see in the woman when Jesus offers her water that will quench every thirst: "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst or come here to draw." This water will satisfy every thirst because it's infinite; that is how God's love works. It will never wear out.

But here's the thing: as the saying goes you can lead a horse to water but can't make him drink, this is also very true for the spiritual life too. If we are going to come to God and drink the water of eternal life that is offered to us, we have to work to clear out the sin, and also to be aware of the wells that we are going to that aren't satisfying us. Stan got serious about his life, but he made changes that needed to be made. Note the time of day: noon. The sun is right above. It lights up the water in the well. So, it is with God. The light of Gods mercy shines on all of our shadows. Jesus though wants to give us the water that is His mercy, shining that on the shadows and the pain in our lives. But for grace to flow through us, there's the response which we see in Stan's story, in this woman, in all who become spiritually mature.

For one, there is sin. Jesus addresses the moral issues in this woman's life: she has had a few husbands and has made some moral mistakes. Notice though Jesus doesn't start by talking about her sin. First, he meets her where she is at and gives her a message of hope and love. He's aware that she probably has suffered and been used by the men in her life. So, it is with us too. There is accountability for sin, but who we are is also impacted by others; Stan's life was impacted by his father not being there and by seeing hypocrisy amongst other Christians. So it is with us; some people learn the wrong things from parents or family; a person may never have their conscience formed and be taught what matters is the big house on the hill, the perfect college and job, or have a harsh view of God as a tyrannical judge hammered into their head so they are scrupulous and never see God's mercy. The healthy way though is that encounter with mercy like Stan and the woman have, and then the addressing of the sin. Jesus points it out; you've been with five men and live with a man who is not your husband. He does this not to shame but to help her. A healthy conscience does that too. It's important for us to not gloss over sin and dismiss it as just part of who we are, or not a big deal. Yes, we are loved, but we also have to change. We have to take a look at ourselves and say OK, what are these sins, these things I'm battling. What are the sins of omission, the

behaviors that I may not have seen as sinful but are in fact sinful, and what am I going to do to try to overcome them? God will help us to, but we also have to make an effort by learning from our mistakes too. Stan realized he should have been a better father. He couldn't fix the past, but he talked with his children as they were older and became a good father to his two other kids. He also started studying the faith, going to Mass, and setting about to have his marriage blessed. The change came after the encounter with mercy. We need to do the same thing too by striving to overcome sin.

Beyond that though, there are things that don't quench our thirst we get so focused on that aren't sinful but can take too much of a role. There's nothing wrong with wealth or getting the house on the hill and becoming a sunglasses tycoon. But if it's more important than your family and God, it's a problem. So along with sin preventing us from experiencing God's love, so too can things, tangible and intangible that become our primary focus in life, become too important. The well of approval; the well of sexual pleasure; the well of power; the well of money; the well of being a busybody. Sometimes we can focus on being not the best Christian he could be, but on projecting an image to others - and in the end we'll be left thirsty until we came back to God. So along with our sin, we need to ask

ourselves are we spending too much time chasing the things that don't give us ultimate happiness or leave us truly satisfied?

Finally, notice what happens in this woman. The more she spends time with Jesus, the more she sees him for who he is, and realizes what she must do: tell others about Him. Jay, his father-in-law, does this to reach out to Stan with mercy. As the woman's eyes are opened, Jesus goes from "sir" at the start to "Prophet" to possibly being the Christ. When a person has a deep love for God in their heart, they want to share that with the world. That's our challenge too, but it's not easy. It requires a big commitment. We have to be willing to give time to others, a valuable commodity. We have to start with mercy like Jay did with Stan, not "here's what you are doing wrong" or lecturing people; for Jesus doesn't start there, it's only after He meets the woman that He gently goes there. And we also have to be willing to be disliked and ostracized ourselves, because we have to call out sin for what it is. Now again, remember Jesus does not start with that, nor should we. We invite people to come to know God, and we get to know them. But we also don't turn away from misguided beliefs or sin. We can't fear challenging someone when it becomes apparent that they are sinning through their lifestyle choice or their actions such as

gossip, profanity, setting a bad example for their kids etc. And we also can't fear talking about things that people maybe find uncomfortable. Evangelization is messy work, and due to the effects of original sin and the devil, sin is alive and well in the world. Our attitude isn't "I'm OK, you're OK" but rather one that tries to help the sinner by telling them the truth - something we can't fear doing.

I'd just like to close with a prayer from Padre Pio that he would say after Communion. It reads:

Stay with me, Lord, for it is necessary to have You present so that I do not forget You. You know how easily I abandon You.
Stay with me, Lord, because I am weak
and I need Your strength,
that I may not fall so often.
Stay with me, Lord, for You are my life,
and without You, I am without fervor.
Stay with me, Lord, for You are my light,
and without You, I am in darkness.
Stay with me, Lord, to show me Your will.

Stay with me, Lord, so that I hear Your voice

and follow You.

Stay with me, Lord, for I desire to love You

very much, and always be in Your company.

Stay with me, Lord, if You wish me to be faithful to You.

Stay with me, Lord, for as poor as my soul is,

I want it to be a place of consolation for You, a nest of love.

Stay with me, Jesus, for it is getting late and the day is coming to a close, and life passes; death, judgment, eternity approaches. It is necessary to renew my strength, so that I will not stop along the way and for that, I need You.

It is getting late and death approaches,

I fear the darkness, the temptations, the dryness, the cross, the sorrows.

O how I need You, my Jesus, in this night of exile!

Stay with me tonight, Jesus, in life with all it’s dangers. I need You.

Let me recognize You as Your disciples did at the breaking of the bread, so that the Eucharistic Communion be the Light which disperses the darkness, the force which sustains me, the unique joy of my heart.

Stay with me, Lord, because at the hour of my death, I want to remain united to You, if not by communion, at least by grace and love.

Stay with me, Jesus, I do not ask for divine consolation, because I do not merit it, but the gift of Your Presence, oh yes, I ask this of You!
Stay with me, Lord, for it is You alone I look for, Your Love, Your Grace, Your Will, Your Heart, Your Spirit, because I love You and ask no other reward but to love You more and more.
With a firm love, I will love You with all my heart while on earth
and continue to love You perfectly during all eternity. Amen.

Jesus wants to always stay with us and give us mercy which will satiate our deepest thirst. May we stay with Him and respond to that mercy, so we hunger and thirst for him, putting down the water jug we kept filling with the wrong things, leaving it behind to help others find Him too.