

Homily based on the readings from March 16, 2026 (Isaiah 65.17-21; John 4.43-54)

Most of us are so accustomed to the modern formatting of the Bible that it is difficult to imagine what it would have looked like when it was originally written. Rather than being a single volume, a copy of the Bible would have consisted of a large collection of separate scrolls – more like a library than an individual book. It is also worth noting that the books of the Bible were not formally subdivided into chapters until the year 1205 – with the verse numbers not being added until 1551.

Even though the organizational structure is relatively modern, it is often instructive to consider the chapters of the Bible as a whole. There can be a thematic unity to an entire chapter, which may not be apparent in shorter passages. The fourth chapter of the Gospel of John, the end of which we heard just a few moments ago, is a particularly striking example. The story from today's reading, of course, relates to a specific interaction between Jesus and a royal official. When the official learns

that Jesus is preaching in a nearby village, he actively seeks him out and implores him to heal his dying son. Jesus responds with absolute clarity and simplicity: “You may go; your son will live.” This event, of course, leads the official – and his entire household – to come to belief in Christ.

At a basic level, this passage is completely self-explanatory. We see the illness of the son, the desperation of the father, and the healing power of Jesus Christ. A number of similar incidents appear throughout the New Testament. What makes this particular episode so distinctive is its *context* – the other event in this chapter with which it is paired. Perhaps by coincidence, we heard the first portion of the chapter about eight days ago – on the Third Sunday of Lent. As you may recall, it was the story of the Samaritan woman at the well.

The question we should consider is whether there is any unifying theme that connects these two events. To some extent, it may simply be a matter of chronology – that Jesus encountered the royal official shortly after meeting the woman at the well. On the other hand, it is also likely

that the two incidents somehow illustrate the same basic principle. I will refrain from making a line-by-line comparison, but there is at least one obvious point of similarity. Both the woman at the well and the royal official are looking for something that, on its own terms, can be viewed as wholesome and even necessary – but which does not represent the fullness of what Christ is capable of giving us. The woman at the well is hoping to find a permanent remedy for her *physical* thirst. Likewise, the royal official is trying to obtain *physical* healing for his son. Jesus, of course, is not unsympathetic to their requests, but he is frustrated that they are not seeking something more *substantial*. He did not come to earth merely to provide physical comfort and healing – as important as that may be. Jesus is offering us something infinitely more valuable: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have *eternal* life.”

All of us, of course, are prone to the same limitations as the woman at the well and the royal official. Throughout our lives, we make countless requests relating to our earthly existence: health, prosperity, academic

or professional success, the well-being of our families. Although it is never inappropriate to ask for God's assistance with our material needs, our deepest necessities lie beyond anything we could possibly see, hear, touch, or taste. The danger we all face is not that God will fail to grant our most important requests, but that we *ourselves* will lack the *wisdom* and the *insight* to understand what to ask.