

Scripture Study

Third Sunday of Lent – Cycle A



Opening prayer

Exodus 17:3-7

(Ps 95:1-2,6-9)

Romans 5:1-2,5-8

John 4:5-42

Overview of the Gospel:

- This Sunday's Gospel reading takes place early in Jesus' ministry, on the heels of his baptism in the Jordan, the wedding at Cana, and his conversation with Nicodemus about the need to be born anew from water and the Spirit (John 1—3).
- Jesus and his disciples are traveling from Judea, north to Galilee. There were two possible routes—through Samaria, or a longer route that bypassed that area.
- Most Jews making the journey avoided going through Samaria. This was because of the longstanding enmity between the two peoples (verse 9) going back to Old Testament times (Ezra 4:1ff). The Jews considered the Samaritans, who claimed some ancestry to the OT patriarchs (verse 12) to be half-pagan (2 Kings 17:24-41).
- The meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan woman takes place at noon. Going to the village well to retrieve the day's household water supply was a task usually done in the morning. The fact that this woman chooses a time when there would be no other women around indicates she wanted to avoid contact with them, perhaps because of her reputation.
- These facts, coupled with the cultural and religious taboos against men speaking with unrelated women, made Jesus' addressing this woman all the more shocking.
- A careful reading of this story shows the gradual unfolding of conversion as Jesus, starting from a casual conversation, brings her to a deeper understanding.

Questions:

- In the 1st Reading, from where does the water come from? Who does St. Paul identify this in some way with (1 Cor 10:4)? What does Jesus promise he will give those who believe in him (John 7:38)? In the Gospel, what does he promise the woman at the well (verse 14)?
- What is significant about the Gospel story taking place in Samaria?
- Since “nice girls” did not come to draw water at noontime, why do you think Jesus risked his reputation to ask a favor of this woman?
- How would you describe the woman's response? How does Jesus turn the tables on her in verse 10? In the woman's reply, what is she really saying?
- Why are the disciples surprised to find Jesus with this woman?
- What does leaving her water jar reveal about Jesus' impact on the woman? How did she affect others? What can we learn from her telling others about Jesus?
- Considering your interest in “spiritual things,” are you more like the disciples or the woman? Why? Is doing God's will as essential for you as eating food?
- What are you constantly “thirsting” for? How has Jesus satisfied you?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 439, 694, 728, 1179, 2557, 2560-61, 2652, 2824

Closing Prayer

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings this week!

Scatter your seed, apostolic soul. The wind of grace will bear it away if the furrow where it falls is not worthy.... Sow, and be certain that the seed will take root and bear fruit. --St Josemaria Escriva

“Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give will never thirst”

Gospel Reading: *John 4:5-42*

Meditation: Would you give water to somebody who snubbed you or treated you like an enemy? Jesus did just that and more! He treated Samaritans, the sworn enemies of the Jews, with great kindness and respect. The Jews and the Samaritans who lived in Israel between Galilee and Judea, had been divided for centuries. They had no dealings with one another, avoiding all social contact, even trade, and inter-marriage. If their paths crossed it would not be unusual for hostility to break out. When Jesus decided to pass through Samaria he stopped at Jacob's well because it was mid-day and he was both exhausted and thirsty.

Jacob's well was a good mile and a half from the nearest town, called Sychar. It wasn't easy to draw water from this well since it was over a hundred feet deep. Jesus had neither rope nor bucket to fetch the water. When a Samaritan woman showed up at the well, both were caught by surprise. Why would a Samaritan woman walk a mile and a half in the mid-day heat to fetch her water at a remote well rather than in the local town? She was an outcast and not welcomed among her townspeople. Jesus then did something no respectable Jew would think of doing. He reached out to a Samaritan, thus risking ritual impurity and scorn from his fellow Jews. He also did something no strict Rabbi would dare to do in public without loss to his reputation. He greeted the woman and spoke openly with her. Not only was she a woman, but an adulteress and public sinner as well. No decent Jew or Samaritan would even think of being seen with such a woman, let alone exchanging a word with her!

Jesus broke through the barriers of prejudice, hostility, and tradition to bring the good news of peace and reconciliation to Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles alike. He demonstrated the universality of the gospel both in word and deed. No one is barred from



the love of God and the good news of salvation. There is only one thing that can keep us from God and his redeeming love – our stubborn pride and willful rebellion.

What is the point of Jesus' exchange with the Samaritan woman about water? Water in the arid land was scarce. Jacob's well was located in a strategic fork of the road between Samaria and Galilee. One can live without food for several days, but not without water. Water is a source of life and growth for all living things. When rain came to the desert, the water transformed the wasteland into a fertile field. The kind of water which Jesus spoke about was living, running, fresh, pure water. Fresh water from a cool running stream was always preferred to the still water one might find in a pool or reservoir. When the Israelites complained about lack of water in the wilderness, God instructed Moses to strike the rock and a stream of fresh living water gushed out (Exodus 17:6). Even though the Israelites did not trust God to care for them in the wilderness, God, nonetheless gave them abundant water and provision through the intercession of his servant Moses.

The image of "living water" is used throughout the scriptures as a symbol of God's wisdom, a wisdom that imparts life and blessing to all who receive it. "The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life" (Proverbs 13:14). "Living water" was also a symbol for

the Jews of thirst of the soul for God. The water which Jesus spoke of symbolized the Holy Spirit and his work of recreating us in God's image and sustaining in us the new life which comes from God. The life which the Holy Spirit produces in us makes us a "new creation" in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). Do you thirst for God and for the life of the Holy Spirit within you?

Hippolytus, a second century Christian writer, explains the significance of the Holy Spirit's work in us: "This is the water of the Spirit: It refreshes paradise, enriches the earth, gives life to living things. It is the water of Christ's baptism; it is our life. If you go with faith to this renewing fountain, you renounce Satan your enemy and confess Christ your God. You cease to be a slave and become an adopted son; you come forth radiant as the sun and brilliant with justice; you come forth a son of God and fellow-heir with Christ." (From a sermon, *On the Epiphany*)

Basil the Great (c. 330-379) speaks in a similar manner: "The Spirit restores paradise to us and the way to heaven and adoption as children of God; he instills confidence that we may call God truly Father and grants us the grace of Christ to be children of the light and to enjoy eternal glory. In a word, he bestows the fullness of blessings in this world and the next; for we may contemplate now in the mirror of faith the promised things we shall someday enjoy. If this is the foretaste, what must the reality be? If these are the first fruits, what must be the harvest?" (From the treatise, *The Holy Spirit*)

"Lord Jesus, my soul thirsts for you. Fill me with your Holy Spirit that I may always find joy in your presence and take delight in doing your will."

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