

GOSPEL

JOHN 4:5-7, 9-11, 13-29, 40-42

Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband". The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me the hour is coming when you will worship neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. The hour is coming when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming'. 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?'

So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.'

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

The Gospel for this Third Sunday of Lent presents Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman. The encounter takes place as Jesus is crossing Samaria, a region between Judea and Galilee inhabited by people

whom the Hebrews despised, considering them schismatic and heretical. But this very population would be one of the first to adhere to the Christian preaching of the Apostles. While the disciples go into the village to buy food, Jesus stays near a well and asks a woman for a drink; she had come there to draw water. From this request a dialogue begins. "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?". Jesus responded: If you knew who I am, and the gift I have for you, you would have asked me for and I would have given you "living water", a water that satisfies all thirst and becomes a boundless spring in the heart of those who drink it.

Going to the well to draw water is burdensome and tedious; it would be lovely to have a gushing spring available! But Jesus speaks of a different water. When the woman realizes that the man she is speaking with is a prophet, she confides in him her own life and asks him religious questions. Her thirst for affection and a full life had not been satisfied by the five husbands she had had, but instead, she had experienced disappointment and deceit. Thus, the woman was struck by the great respect Jesus had for her, and when he actually spoke to her of true faith as the relationship with God the Father "in spirit and truth", she realized that this man could be the Messiah, and Jesus does something extremely rare — he confirms it: "I who speak to you am he". He says he is the Messiah to a woman who had such a disordered life.

Dear brothers and sisters, the water that gives eternal life was poured into our hearts on the day of our Baptism; then God transformed and filled us with his grace. But we may have forgotten this great gift that we received, or reduced it to a merely official statistic; and perhaps we seek "wells" whose water does not quench our thirst. When we forget the true water, we go in search of wells that do not have clean water. Thus this Gospel passage actually concerns us! Not just the Samaritan woman, but us.

Jesus speaks to us as he does to the Samaritan woman. Of course, we already know him, but perhaps we have not yet encountered him personally. We know who Jesus is, but perhaps we have not countered him personally, spoken with him, and we still have not recognized him as our Saviour. This Season of Lent is a good occasion to draw near to him, to counter him in prayer in a heart-to-heart dialogue; to speak with him, to listen to him. It is a good occasion to see his face in the face of a suffering brother or sister. In this way we can

renew in ourselves the grace of Baptism, quench our thirst at the wellspring of the Word of God and of his Holy Spirit; and in this way, also discover the joy of becoming artisans of reconciliation and instruments of peace in daily life.

May the Virgin Mary help us to draw constantly from grace, from the water that springs from the rock that is Christ the Saviour, so that we may profess our faith with conviction and joyfully proclaim the wonders of the love of merciful God, the source of all good.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- The woman was carrying many heavy burdens to which she felt trapped and tied. Describe some of the ways this has been your own experience.
- Jesus' presence led to deep relationship. How do you feel about the idea of Jesus desiring such a deep relationship with you, filling you with living water?
- The woman's experience of encountering Jesus led her to such joy which enabled her to overcome her fears and invite others into a similar encounter. Describe your own moments of encountering the presence of Jesus and how this encounter affects your life.

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.