

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

Gospel: John 4:5-42

Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 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." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) 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? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" 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'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" 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?" They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. 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."

REFLECTION 1:

THE WELLSPRING OF ETERNAL LIFE

Unique to the fourth Gospel, the woman who encountered Jesus at Jacob's Well is not named by the Evangelist John. However, she is honoured as a saint among Orthodox believers. St. Photina is credited with preaching the Gospel among the Samaritans. Later with her five sisters and her son, Josiah, she preached in Cartage and Rome, where it was said she converted the daughter of Nero. Later she was imprisoned in Rome before being thrown into a well, where she died. She, who met and believed in the Lord of Life at a well, gave her life for her faith at one.

In telling the woman's experience at Jacob's Well at Sychar, the evangelist took the occasion to teach about the wellsprings of eternal life which Jesus would give to anyone who asked. John portrays Jesus as the giver of the water of life replacing the 'water' that had quenched the thirst of the Jews, i.e. the Torah or the law. The law was described as the 'water that purifies, satisfies thirst and sustains life'. When Jesus came among us with his offer of living water he replaced the law. Through baptism into Jesus' life and death, believers bathe in and drink from the wellspring of eternal life that he has made available to all.

Notice the woman's lack of understanding; this enabled Jesus to clarify his teaching and draw his listeners nearer to the truth he intended to convey. The woman initially misunderstood Jesus' offer of living water and she did not understand why he a Jew and a known teacher would associate with her, a woman and a Samaritan. Through her subsequent conversation the woman was led to understand that Jesus was offering to her and to everyone else who asked, without distinction of race, the water of eternal life. Because of Jesus and the accomplishment of his 'hour' (His passion, death and resurrection) all are offered a relationship with God. This would transcend all former approaches and places of worship (Gerizim, Jerusalem). Because of Jesus all from now on can worship God in Spirit and in truth.

For their part, the disciples also misunderstood that the food of which Jesus spoke was not what they had gone to buy in the shops, but the will of the One who sent him. Exemplary in her response to Jesus the woman went away from her encounter a changed person. She could not help but share the good news she had encountered. Her behaviour is held out to us as an example we might follow. Transformed by our experience with Jesus, in word and sacrament and in one another, we are to make known the good news with our lips and our lives, so that others too might come to know that Jesus is truly the Saviour of the world.

REFLECTION 2:

THE WATER OF LIFE

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