

3rd Sunday of Lent, Year A

GOSPEL

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Jesus came to the Samaritan town called Sychar, near the land that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well is there and Jesus, tired by the journey, sat straight down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, 'What? You are a Jew and you ask me, a Samaritan, for a drink?'—Jews, in fact, do not associate with Samaritans. Jesus replied:

'If you only knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you: Give me a drink, you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water.'

'You have no bucket, sir,' she answered 'and the well is deep: how could you get this living water? Are you a greater man than our father Jacob who gave us this well and drank from it himself with his sons and his cattle?' Jesus replied:

'Whoever drinks this water will get thirsty again; but anyone who drinks the water that I shall give will never be thirsty again: the water that I shall give will turn into a spring inside him, welling up to eternal life.'

'Sir,' said the woman 'give me some of that water, so that I may never get thirsty and never have to come here again to draw water. I see you are a prophet, sir. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, while you say that Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.'

Jesus said:

'Believe me, woman, 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 do know: for salvation comes from the Jews. But the hour will come—in fact it is here already—when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: that is the kind of worshipper the Father wants. God is spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and truth.'

The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah—that is, Christ—is coming; and when he comes he will tell us everything.' 'I who am speaking to you,' said Jesus 'I am he.'

Many Samaritans of that town had believed in him on the strength of the woman's testimony when she said, 'He told me all I have ever done', so, when the Samaritans came up to him, they begged him to stay with them. He stayed for two days, and when he spoke to them many more came to believe; and they said to the woman, 'Now we no longer believe because of what you told us; we have heard him ourselves and we know that he really is the saviour of the world.'

(John 4:5–16, 19–26, 39–42)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- There was an ancient enmity between the Jews and Samaritans that sprang from the split of Israel and Judah into two kingdoms after the death of Solomon. Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom while Jerusalem remained the capital in the south. The Samaritans built a 'break-away' temple on Mount Gerizim.
- In speaking to a woman who is unknown to him, and a Samaritan woman at that, Jesus is contravening the acceptable social mores of his time. This causes shock in the disciples but indicates that the kingdom of God is open to all who recognise Jesus.
- The first scrutiny for those preparing for baptism or reception takes place today. A scrutiny is a rite in which people are encouraged to uncover 'all that is weak, defective and sinful in their hearts' so that God may heal it, and to recognise 'all that is upright, strong and good'.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This gospel should be read in conjunction with the first reading from Exodus, in which the people of Israel, liberated from slavery in Egypt, are left thirsting in the desert. God provides them with water to sustain their journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land. In the gospel, the thirst of the Samaritan woman is a much more profound thirst, and her openness to the living water offered by Jesus and her gradual journey to faith are at the heart of this text. She moves from a superficial understanding that Jesus may be offering her a permanent supply of water to a deeper appreciation of him as one who intimately understands the yearning of the human heart and offers her a way forward. Not only does the woman come to faith but she is also instrumental in leading others to belief, using the classic words of invitation to discipleship in John's Gospel: 'Come and see a man ... I wonder if he is the Christ?'

- Do you sometimes have a superficial understanding of what Jesus offers? How can you continue to deepen your appreciation of Jesus?
- What 'thirst' characterises your life at the moment?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- ‘How will you get this living water?’ Reflect on your journey so far.
- ‘If you only knew what God is offering ...’ What is it that you are being offered by God? What would you ask of Jesus?
- What sense do you have of the spring welling up inside you?
- Recall your own first invitation to faith. What was it that led you to seek the living water? Share your reflections and offer thanks to those who have assisted your journey.
- Who do you know who is thirsty for company, acceptance or affirmation? Respond to their needs this week.
- Use today’s gospel acclamation for your prayer this week:

*Lord, you are truly the Saviour of the world;
give me living water that I may never thirst again.*

SHARING THE TRADITION

A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God's word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ

This image of living water cannot help but draw attention to baptism, which is now only weeks away. It is the foundational sacrament of the Church and draws us into the life of faith.

- Look at the prayer of blessing over the water from the rite (*RCIA*, §215) and trace the images of water, so central in the Scriptures, that are identified in this prayer.
- Water is fast becoming one of the most precious commodities on our planet. Discuss the ways we use and appreciate water in our own time, including its symbolic value in so many aspects of our lives.
- Use this opportunity to check on how the elect are preparing and how they are feeling about their own approaching baptism.

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

This text is really about the woman's journey towards faith in Jesus. She begins with surprise that he would even speak to her and gradually deepens in her conviction that he is the Messiah; finally she leads others in her village to faith in Jesus as well. Does this echo something of your own journey?

LIVING THE WORD

Practical ideas for group leaders to employ in connecting Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment

- What special preparations are being made in your community for the ceremonies of the Easter Vigil? Do the elect know and understand all that will happen on that night. It may be possible to invite a former catechumen in to speak of their experience of the Easter Vigil.
- Use a bowl of water as a focus for prayer. Affirm each one of the group in their final preparations. Choose the prayers for today from the petitions for the elect and the exorcisms of the first scrutiny (*RCIA*, §§140, 141). A suitable song could be 'Come to the water' (GA 403).

NOTES