

LENT WEEK 3 (Alternative)

John 4:5-15,19-26,39-42

Alternative gospel readings are offered for use on the 3rd, 4th and 5th Sundays of Lent which are recommended when celebrating the Scrutinies of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. They are The Woman at the Well (The First Scrutiny - John 4:3-42), The Man Born Blind (The Second Scrutiny - John 9:1-41) and The Raising of Lazarus from the Dead (The Third Scrutiny - John 11:1-44). Each offer a rich basis of reflection for those approaching the Sacraments of Initiation as well as the call to repentance and continuing conversion of each of us.

GOSPEL READING:

So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings 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 nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water. I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship."

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 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 worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people 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 (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." 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 indeed the Saviour of the world."

REFLECTION:

Reading this marvellous story we can see that Jesus reserves one of the richest descriptions of himself and his mission for one of his society's ultimate outsiders, the Samaritan divorcee! Despite

her nationality, despite her state of life, Jesus clearly meant her to hear all of this, he literally (in terms of geography from Judea to Galilee) went out of his way to speak to someone who, to convention, was insignificant. However, the Lord of Lords, the Messiah, the inheritor of the Promise, wanted to be known by her, to give her hope and to save her through the 'living waters'.

Like us, the Samaritan woman was seeking answers to questions. Like us, she needed what he offers.

Jesus came to earth with a mission. He came to restore humanity's relationship with the Father. We couldn't raise ourselves up so he came down! He humbled himself, he became one of us, took rest and sleep, got hungry and thirsty. As he endured physical privation, he offers so much more (living water, bread of life).

As God walked with the Samaritan woman, she was so transported with joy that she forgot her water when she ran home. She acknowledged his greatness, trusted in his love for her. God still comes down to us and, if we let him, we will discern a real difference in our lives.

- Share something that has struck you afresh from this familiar reading.
- Would you say that you and your parish community have as much conviction in Jesus Christ as the Samaritan woman who went and told the whole town?
- In your life as a Christian, is there one moment or experience that is most like that of the Samaritan woman?
- Where do we get to ask questions like the Samaritan woman asked of Jesus?