

Lent 3rd Sunday (A)

20<sup>th</sup> March 2022

‘Samaritan woman: sins & conversion’

Ex 17: (at Massah in the desert ...)

Rom 5: *Christ died for us while we were still sinners*

Jn 4: 5–42: *Sir, give me some of that water ...*

The 3 middle Sundays of Lent (nos. 3, 4 & 5) have wonderful Gospel texts that traditionally are read — a series of very long passages from St John’s Gospel (Jn 4 / 9 / 11). Although alternatives are offered in the lectionary for Yrs B & C, yet because the long Johannine texts relate directly to the gift of Baptism, the washing away of sin, and new life in Christ — and because we are preparing for a baptism (Katerina’s) at Easter — we *are* going to listen each week to the *whole* of these long dialogues, to hear exactly, and fully, what the Lord has to say. I’ll balance that with preaching for a bit less time than usual.

On each of these Sundays, because an important element of Lent is to examine our consciences and make a good confession as Easter draws nearer, I will use these wonderful texts from St John to help us make an extended examination of conscience. As we hear, today, of Jesus’s extraordinary encounter with the Samaritan woman, what

comes to the fore? What is it that this meeting reminds us of in our relations with God and our neighbour? As Jesus converses with this woman with her complicated personal situation, what occurs to us? What does he help her unearth; what does he help her admit; what does he then open up, for her healing and for forgiveness? As we hear Jesus do this saving work, what comes to mind for us; what stirs in *our* consciences that is in need of His forgiveness?

1. First, we note His **stopping to talk to her**, both as a Samaritan and as a woman. The Gospel-writer comments that this in itself gave surprise, that a Jewish male should do so. So, we might ask ourselves in response: would *we* ever be guilty of making sexist or racist comments; pre-judging others on basis of race or gender? Is there anything that we could do with owning up to Jesus about?
2. Then there is the fact of His **asking for a simple cup of water**. This probably make us think: have we ever been neglectful of anyone, neighbour or stranger, in need of a simple bit of hospitality or

kindness? Living and studying in this vicinity, we can't help but help see the needs of the homeless, for example. Whether we respond to this with support for our own SVP group, donating regularly to a homelessness charity, or offering to buy some food from time to time for someone on the streets, we do need to examine our hearts on this. Is there anything here that we need to bring to Jesus for forgiveness?

3. What about **the worship of God**? Jesus and the Samaritan woman have a discussion about how and where God is worshipped. We know that God is honoured in Christ most perfectly in the Holy Mass. What is our relationship with a commitment to daily prayer and to the Sunday Mass? — has there been any careless neglect of Jesus in our hearts which we must bring to Jesus to seek reconciliation with Him?
4. The Samaritan woman recognizes Jesus truly as holy when he asks her **about her marriage(s)**. She admits that it has not at all been straightforward, and senses in His questioning not a threat, but the divine

offer of healing and reconciliation. It's exactly this matter that she communicates to her friends: "Come and see a man who has told me everything I ever did; I wonder if He is the Christ?" Do we too, any of us, need forgiveness from our Saviour to resolve and heal situations in our romantic relationships, any undue possessiveness, lack of chastity, unkindness?

5. Finally: the question of **spreading the Gospel**. The Samaritan woman goes straight back to tell the townspeople of Jesus. Are *we* finding ways to spread the Gospel; are we definitely taking all the opportunities to make known to those around us the blessings of faith in the Lord? Or are we hiding it away? — and is this, too, a failing we might need to reflect on and bring to Confession?

The encounter of Jesus with this woman brought her from guilt & sin to faith & mission. Challenging her life, yet His conversation with her was life-giving, and helped her know that without condemnation that she could have life in Him, her sins forgiven.