

Lent 3rd Sunday (A)

12<sup>th</sup> March 2023

‘Lent John texts I: Samaritan woman’

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 ...*

For me, and for the Church in general, the *meat* of Lent, so to speak, is the Sundays III, IV, V. Each has a traditional and long, Gospel text associated with it, as you will have noticed already today. Jn chs. 4, 9, & 11 describe three life-changing encounters with Jesus: the Samaritan Woman (at the well); the Man born Blind; and Lazarus, who had died. In the crucial middle weeks of Lent, fired up, as it were, by these 3 Sunday Gospels, we need to do a ‘deep dive’ into our consciences and echo within ourselves those same life-changing experiences. Any and every Gospel encounter is *for us*; any and every conversation that Jesus has with those He met is a conversation that *we are meant to be part of*; it’s not merely some historical narrative that we monitor from afar. “*The Word of God is something alive and active; it cuts more finely than any double-edged sword.*” So, with great attentiveness in these Sundays let’s listen acutely to Our Lord as He brings these individuals to

life in Him: *from sin to faith; from blindness to sight; from death to life.* Associating ourselves closely with these saving dialogues, and with these individuals, let’s allow the Lord to question, and speak directly to, our hearts, and so make this Lent a time of true *metanoia* — repentance and change of life.

What do we discover, then, as we devoutly share in this encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan Woman? What inspirations to prayer do we find; what actions called for; what sins to confess; what changes required of our lives? 6 lessons:

- (i) First, we find that we **are worthy of a dialogue with Jesus**. He does not shun us and speak only to the saints. He speaks to us; He *wants* to speak to us. Do we give Him the time and space to do so? We may fill our days with the chores and the daily round, but we need to be able to stop, to be quiet, to pray. We need to find time to talk to Jesus. Without giving Him that time, how can He change us for the better? He wishes to have us converse with Him, and to “tell our tale of misery.” He wishes us to trust Him with our lives, so as to give us direction.
- (ii) He wishes us, specifically, **to desire the water of life**, the Holy Spirit, who is “pleasant coolness in the heat,

solace in the midst of woe.” The Woman at the Well could hardly believe that Jesus could grant such refreshment as He offers her, and she mistook His words for some earthly restorative. But the grace of the Spirit — the “living water” — is indeed ours for the having, if we ask for it. We *must* be making this prayer, this request for the Spirit, His gifts, His divine life and solace.

- (iii) Jesus wishes that we express **due and equal dignity to men and to women**. No misogyny. Our language and our attitudes can sometimes be lacking in appropriate kindness, equality and dignity, but, as the apostles found, Jesus did away with the customary inequalities, and treated everyone equally, and the women He met with especial tenderness.
- (iv) Jesus’s dialogue in Jn 4 also highlights the practical necessity to **help those who struggle to draw water**. I think of CaFOD’s campaign, a few years back, that focussed on access to clean water — so many globally still lack this *basic necessity*. So, when we give alms this Lent, let’s look to help especially, and generously, those who are the most poor and needy.
- (v) Crucially, note that we are not shunned by Jesus **if we**

**have sinned**, even gravely. The woman was afraid to go to the well in the morning, because of her contemporaries’ bad opinion of her. But even if we have love lives that are “complicated,” or chastity that is “compromised,” Jesus sees all, He knows all, and He wishes to heal all. The Woman at the Well said, “He told me everything I had ever done,” the embarrassment having been overcome. We also need to trust absolutely in His calling us to that infallible forum of mercy where we can seek forgiveness, i.e. Confession. When, exactly, will we get to Confession this Lent? Let’s promise to do so.

- (vi) Finally, Jesus wishes us to be active evangelizers. We are never Christians just for ourselves. The Woman, as soon as she finds Jesus’s tender concern, His knowledge of her hidden life, His forgiveness, and His offer of divine life, was **compelled to share this “good news.”** How, and whom, are we evangelizing? Are we evangelizing at all? What about our nearest and dearest, at least, friends and family? Any one of us, like this Woman, when we have truly met Jesus, can share in our own way just what it means to know Him and love Him and follow Him.