

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent

Exodus 17:1-7

Rom 5:1-2, 5-8

Jn 4:4-15, 19-26, 39-42

Water is essential for life. In S.T. Coleridge's poem the Ancient Mariner, it was a question of 'water water everywhere, but not a drop to drink.' Moses led his people into the wilderness where also there was no water to drink, so the people complained to him, and about him. There was a deeper issue and that was that God had said that he would lead them to the Promised Land but when the going got tough, doubt crept in and the people stopped trusting God's promises. In other words, in tough times they abandoned their faith in God and relied entirely on their own abilities.

St John's Gospel emphasises the necessity of water. In the second chapter we read of the turning of water into wine. In chapter 3 we read of the necessity of being born of water and the spirit. In chapter 5 we read of the healing that occurred at the Pool of Bethesda, and in today's Gospel reading from chapter 4, we read of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well where they held a conversation about the water of life.

Jews considered Samaritans to be renegades and heretics, so for Jesus to engage with this woman was a breach of Jewish religious, social and cultural norms. The woman is rather flippant about Jesus' offer of living water, but Jesus refused to play her game. He cuts through her defences and focuses on her rather colourful personal life that included 5 husbands and a de facto. This caused her unease, so she tried to deflect the conversation to religious matters. When people spend their time arguing about religious minutiae, they are deflected from their spiritual relationship with God, their mission and their life of discipleship.

Jesus deflected her desire to talk about religious issues and focussed on spiritual issues. He considered the discussion about whether God could only be worshipped in Jerusalem or on top of a mountain to be a minor issue, while the recognition and acceptance of the true identity of Jesus is central to having a right relationship with God.

Jesus did not come to tell people *how* to live, but to introduce them to a *way of life*. He didn't come to found a new religion but to break down the wall of separation that self-centredness creates between God and ourselves. He didn't come just to *tell* us about God's Kingdom but to *show* us what it is and how to embrace the eternal life that God offers us within it.

St Paul reinforces this in his epistle to the Romans by pointing out that through the Holy Spirit, Who has been poured into our hearts, we are able to enjoy the loving relationship with God that Jesus has won for us. When we gather for Mass we worship God in Spirit and in Truth in common with our fellow believers. How we worship must reflect what we believe as a community of the Church, not what we would prefer as individuals.

Once the Samaritan woman grasped this point about God's kingdom, she did not hesitate to share the good news about Jesus with the others from her village. She not only shared what she now knew, she invited them to come with her so they could meet Jesus themselves and make their own minds up. She invited them to 'Come and See.'

This is the model of evangelism St John's Gospel presents to us on several occasions in the early chapters of his gospel. Evangelism is sharing the story of Jesus, but more importantly it is inviting others to come into our community so they can see and encounter Him for themselves. This is only possible if the members of our community, each one of us, are committed to God and are excited about the faith we have received and believe. We cannot offer to others what we ourselves do not own.

Why should people come if there is nothing here that they cannot receive in the world? Why should people stay if the community is nothing more than an entertainment venue or social club? Good entertainment may draw them initially, but without a real experience of God, sound teaching and pastoral care, the initial experience will fade because the foundations are weak.

It is more than irresponsible of us to leave others floundering in a spiritual desert when we know where the bread and water of eternal life are to be found. The Samaritan woman didn't, neither should we.

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