

15<sup>th</sup> March 2020 (3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent, Year A)

Exodus 17:3-7; Psalm 94(95):1-2,6-9; Romans 5:1-2,5-8; John 4:5-42.

### ***'Saviour of the world.'***

During the forty days of Lent, we are invited to a change of heart, and to engage once again with God's word. This change of heart does not happen once, but is a continual process, as we grow ever deeper in our faith relationship in Christ.

At the end of Lent, each year, as we celebrate the feast of Easter, we renew the commitment we made in our Baptism. Part of the Easter celebration is to, once again, reject Satan and our sinfulness, and to profess to embrace ever more strongly our faith in God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Since as human beings we often tend to fail in this journey, it is important for us to regularly re-visit our faith-filled commitment. Our participation in the life of the faith community assists us in our journey. To assist us on our journey, today we are invited to meet the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well in Sychar, and listen to her story of how she discovered Christ.

John the evangelist tells us how, at the sixth hour, when the sun is at its highest, Jesus sits down at the well. No one is around except for the Samaritan woman who, at the height of day, goes out to fill her jar with water. This already tells us something about this woman. Most probably she is trying to avoid the crowds. The other women come to collect water at the beginning of the day, when it is still cool. Why is she avoiding the other women? Later on, we will learn that she has lived with five different men and is currently not with her husband! She is probably the gossip of town!

When Jesus first asks her for some water to drink, she promptly reminds him that he should not even be speaking to her. Firstly, men do not normally talk to women in public, and secondly, he is a Jew while she is a Samaritan, and Jews hate Samaritans with a passion! Fortunately, these useless social norms do not bother or limit Jesus. Here is a woman who, although a sinner, probably an adulteress or a prostitute, is open to accept his message. Jesus does not look at our sins, but at our openness to listen and accept his word; he is always open and ready to reach out to us and engage in conversation with us. He is the living water that will nourish us, every time we need to drink.

As the conversation progresses, the woman puts aside her initial cynicism and addresses Jesus as 'Sir,' a definite sign of respect. Later, when Jesus reveals to her that he knows more about her than she thinks, telling her about the men she has lived with, she understands that he is a prophet, someone who can see hidden things. This leads her to ask even deeper questions; how and where should we worship God? Perhaps even the question: who is God, anyway?

Now that the woman has found the living water, she no longer needs to carry her jar with her. Instead, she leaves it at the well, and runs back into town to tell the others about this strange man she has encountered. God works in very strange ways! Jesus engages with a woman who is probably bullied, and marginalised in her community, and has to go to the well when she is sure there is no one else around, and turns her into a disciple, an apostle and a missionary. She now runs into town and proclaims: could this be the Messiah, the Christ?

There is nothing wrong if we approach God and prayer with cynicism, as long as we always carry with us the openness to listen to God's word wherever we encounter it. It is not our cynicism or our sinfulness that counts, but our readiness to be open and listen. Then we can encounter Jesus, the prophet and the Messiah.

The new apostle brings out her community to the feet of the Christ. When we meet the Christ, we cannot keep the good news to ourselves. A true and deep encounter with Christ leads us to witness and share our faith with those around us. Faith is contagious! True faith creates community! The whole town now comes forth and they believe based on her witness and on their own personal experience of Jesus. In this Jew, they now recognise the Saviour of the World! What a journey of faith!

This journey of faith is in contrast with the faith of the apostles, those who have been daily listening to Jesus preaching and have seen his many miracles. They are not sure they can understand what has happened. What they are concerned about is, not other people's faith journey, but the fact that their lunch is getting cold! Why is Jesus talking to a woman, anyway! Did anyone else bring him food while we were away shopping? We who are always with the Christ can easily lose sight of the truth. Our duty is not to judge our sisters and brothers, trying to determine whether they are living a good life or not. Our real food is to do the will of the Father, to participate in the harvest, and to witness to the Christ we have discovered. Like the woman at the well, our faith should be strong enough to be able to draw to Christ all those we meet in our daily life!

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