

Third Sunday of Lent

March 19, 2017



*O God, author of every mercy and of all goodness,
who in fasting, prayer and almsgiving
have shown us a remedy for sin,
look graciously on this confession of our loneliness,
that we, who are bowed down by our conscience,
may always be lifted up by Christ, your Son
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Collect for the Third Sunday of Lent

Have you ever been thirsty and had no access to water? Even worse, have you had a child with you who could not understand why he or she could not have water even if they asked very politely?

I remember walking through an experimental farm with my sisters and their husbands and small children, with a three year old nephew begging for water. He had recently been taught if he said *please* he generally would get what he wanted. The six adults present kept telling the little one he would get water soon. It seemed that this heartfelt plea made all of us feel exceptionally thirsty.

Upon reading the Scripture and praying with it, we see that it is not that far from our everyday experiences. We are a people who soon forget the greatness in our past. We can be very much like the Israelites who forgot their condition of slavery under the Egyptians (Exodus 17: 3-7). We can be a people who grumble about our current situation.

The present reading we have from Exodus has a back story that is good for us to remember. We know that in our area, much hiking is done and many people use walking sticks or *staves* to aid them on their journey. The staff was with Moses on his whole journey, beginning with his encounter with the Lord in the burning bush (Exodus 4:2-4). When the Lord God questioned Moses as to what was in his hand and Moses answered, a staff, the Lord told Moses to throw it on the ground and it became a snake. Then the Lord told Moses to pick it up by the tail and it returned to being a staff. Moses was then going to his people and was worrying as to how he would communicate the message of the God, who had told him His name as "*I Am Who Am*".



We remember that Moses was brought up in Pharaoh's court. Upon seeing an Egyptian beating an Israelite, he killed the Egyptian and then escaped into Midian, avoiding the punishment of Pharaoh. Moses, escaping Pharaoh who wished to have him killed, came upon a well where the flocks were watered. A priest of Midian had seven daughters, He was indebted to Moses because he made sure their flock were watered. (See Exodus 2)

The priest, Jethro, gave one of his seven daughters, Zipporah, to Moses to be his wife. This checkered history of Moses is ample reason why the Israelites would not necessarily wish to follow him.

The Church then gives us this reading for today: the Israelites are in the desert and there is no water for them to drink. In desperation, Moses cries out to the Lord. The answer of the Lord sounds preposterous but Moses does what he is told, being accompanied by some of the Israelite elders. Water flowing from the rock is God's miracle and the reason the place is called Massah and Meribah, "*Is the Lord in our midst or not?*"



In response to this reading we pray the refrain, "*If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.*" This Psalm is a call for us to praise God for all the goodness he is given us. (Psalm 95)

The second reading for today's Mass (Romans 5:1-2, 5-8) reflects the Gospel in a different way. In reading the Gospel we see Jesus encountering a woman who seems oblivious to her sinfulness. St. Paul reminds us, "*God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.*" In the Gospel, as Jesus dialogs with the woman, she becomes more and more aware of her sinfulness. Jesus is speaking to that woman regardless of her sinfulness.

The Gospel for today (John 4:5-42) is chosen particularly for those entering the Church at the Easter Vigil. (As today's Gospel points to Baptism, next week's gospel illustrates the need of having our eyes opened, ending all blindness, and the following week we are given the Gospel pointing to new life.)

The first couple verses of this chapter of John give us information that may be helpful: *Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself was not baptizing, just his disciples), he left Judea and returned to Galilee.*

He had to pass through Samaria.

For John, his *hour* marks how his life should be lived. He knows that this is not the time for him to be arrested and face death. Therefore, he leaves Jerusalem and its confines to be out of the way of the Pharisees.

Most often when Jews were traveling they would avoid Samaria and go into the Greek area of the Decapolis. So, when the Gospel says he *had* to pass through Samaria a certain point is going to be made.

The gospel scene opens with Jesus, exhausted, sitting by a well belonging to the great patriarch, Jacob (Israel), near where his son, Joseph, was buried, after his body been brought back from Egypt. This scene is further described by saying that it is

noon, the hottest part of the day.

Imagine the surprise of Jesus, alone, because his disciples had gone into town for food, when a Samaritan woman arrives. There are two things, as a good Jew, Jesus should avoid. He should not be in the presence of a woman, alone, nor should he be speaking to a Samaritan, male or female.

When Jesus asked the woman, “*give me a drink*”, the woman answers well, knowing of the prescriptions of the law. In speaking to the woman, Jesus became ritually impure. The reply of Jesus is a great puzzle: “*If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.*”

The answer of Jesus is even more of a puzzle: “*Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.*” This is a call for each of us to reflect on our own Baptism and see how it blesses us with the possibility of eternal life, as we live a Sacramental life in the church.

The woman is still calling Jesus *SIR*. The scene now changes and Jesus tells the woman to go call her husband. The woman replies to Jesus that she has no husband. In the reply of Jesus, the woman sees Jesus as a prophet.

Jesus changes the topic by talking about how the Samaritans and the Jews worship. This way of worshiping will be very different. Now, we are the people who worship in this new way.

“But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed, the Father seeks such people to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth.”

Jesus then uses verbiage that is very well known to both the Jews and the Samaritans by calling himself “*I AM*” he saying he is God, the Messiah.

Upon the return of the disciples, they were amazed but somehow knew something important was happening and did not question.



The Samaritan woman became one of the first evangelizers by going into the village and taking the risk telling the people of the village about this Jesus. Like the early disciples who left their nets to follow Jesus, she left her jar behind.

The scene with the disciples and Jesus is a bit different as they are encouraging Jesus to eat. His reply to them is very similar to what he said to Mary and Joseph when he was twelve and found in the Temple. “*My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work.*” Jesus goes on to explain how his message is spread with many people doing various tasks; ‘*One sows and another reaps.*’

Having the woman going into the village, she was risking rejection but some of the people believed her. Finally, the villagers invited Jesus to stay with them and they believed the word of Jesus. This becomes an example of how the woman sowed the seed, and Jesus became the reaper.

The majority of us are not Catechumens, but the gospel teaches us how we must accept those we reject, who are different from us, and share our faith with them.



World War II was an exceptionally brutal war and the Cathedral in Coventry, England was destroyed in the bombing of November 14th. 1940 by the German Luftwaffe. In the rebuilding of the cathedral, St. Michael’s, they left the bombed-out Church, and the original is now kept with stairs linking the cathedral. The Cross of Nails was made of three nails from the

roof truss of the old cathedral where it sits in the center of the altar cross. It has become a symbol of peace and reconciliation across the world. This inspired a worldwide movement of a network who, inspired by the story of Coventry Cathedral, share a common commitment to work and pray for peace, justice, and reconciliation. We are committed to healing the wounds of history, learning to live with difference and celebrate diversity, and building a culture of peace. In a present climate, we can emulate their spirit and pray with them.

THE COVENTRY LITANY OF RECONCILIATION

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

The hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class,
FATHER FORGIVE

The covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not their own,
FATHER FORGIVE

The greed which exploits the work of human hands and lays waste the earth,
FATHER FORGIVE

Our envy of the welfare and happiness of others,
FATHER FORGIVE

Our indifference to the plight of the imprisoned, the homeless, the refugee,
FATHER FORGIVE

The lust which dishonors the bodies of men, women and children,
FATHER FORGIVE

The pride which leads us to trust in ourselves and not in God,
FATHER FORGIVE

Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.
FATHER FORGIVE