

### **Third Sunday Lent A - The Samaritan Woman**

This salvific event at the well in Sychar is one of conversion that epitomises how someone transitions from misery to mercy. The basic theme centres on Jesus' encounter with this Samaritan woman at the well by offering her "living water" (N.B. wells contain still water) who then converts and evangelises the local town. The first reading also refers to water and reminds us that Christ is the true living water that quenches the thirst of our souls.

The context is essential. While travelling through Samaria, Jesus, tired from his journey, sat at Jacob's well near the town of Sychar, around noon. He sends all the apostles into town, some distance away to buy lunch. Why send them all? Because an encounter with the Lord is always personal – heart to heart – so as to be alone with him.

When the woman arrives at the well to draw water, Jesus, a Jewish rabbi, broke social norms by talking to the woman and asking her for a drink of water from the well, for which she has the bucket. Note that in doing so, he makes himself vulnerable in need of help. It gives this morally estranged woman a moral edge. Now ask yourself why has she chosen to walk so far, at noon, to obtain water when the local town has its own well? Could she have not gone to that well?

Now once the ice is broken and there is dialogue between Jesus and the woman, he moves from well water to "living water – divine grace". "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." She is interested but wary. Initially she calls him Jew, but now she refers to him as Lord or Sir. Her heart is softening, as she asks: "From where do you propose to get this *living water*?" In reply, he promises her that his living water satiates one's thirst. In reply, she prays: "Lord, give me this water, so that I may never thirst again." To receive this inner grace for the soul, Jesus reminds her that every conversion is a turning away from sin, so he exposes her sin – unveils her wounds by saying she has had six husbands. Incidentally this explains why she was unwelcome at the local well!

All moral wounds are delicate, so she pulls back and changes the subject to local politics and worship. "You are a prophet ... should we worship here or in Jerusalem." The Lord lets her detour but then gradually winds her home, by introducing the coming of the Messiah and a time of peace and truth. Such times will grant her peace of soul, for which she longs and hopes. He fulfils her desires by stating I am the Messiah. Once he reveals himself to her, she accepts his healing grace for her wounded nature, is forgiven her sins and transformed. So great is the effect on her that she leaves her jars of water and rushes into the town to tell everyone what has happened. Divine grace leads to joy, which is contagious.

Many come to him now and he stays two days in Sychar teaching them as the Saviour of the world. Note that she who was once an outcast because of her sin, being now sinless is able to influence and evangelise her own people. And that is what evangelisation is – to bring people to the Lord. We are all being called and sometimes the least expected can become the most influential, as was the case with Saul who became St Paul. Let us never forget that every sinner can be a saint and every saint was a sinner.