

Third Sunday of Lent



Prayer for Water

God our Father,
through your Son
you created all life
and the waters that give life.
We come to the well,
like the Samaritan woman,
seeking refreshment.
Help us to see
in all the dry places of our lives
the "spring of water
gushing up to eternal life."
Give us these clear and
abundant waters
that never cease to cleanse and
refresh us.
We ask this through the same
Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sunday, March 27, 2011 Well of Surprises

Today's Readings: Exodus 17:3–7; Romans 5:1–2, 5–8; John 4:5–42. In today's Gospel, Jesus arrives at the well tired, thirsty, and aware that he's among Samaritans who have a long history of conflict with his people. He immediately breaks a social taboo, since a good Jewish boy would never speak to a woman (even his mother, wife, or sister) in public. So the Samaritan woman is surprised—and intrigued. Jesus refuses to categorize her by gender or nationality. He begins by expressing poignant human need, to quench thirst, the same thirst he named from the cross. Then he engages in conversation with her, just as he did with Martha, Peter, and the other disciples.

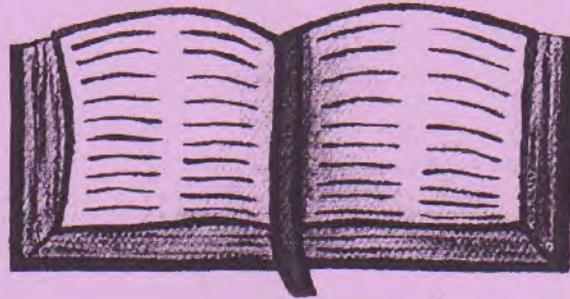
Jesus' habit of engaging people in catechetical conversations is notable: some point out that the Trinity itself is a marvelous conversation or dance among the three Persons of

God. In contrast, the one-sided lecture approach to passing on faith is less engaging. Jesus' conversation liberates the woman from prejudices and irrelevant beliefs. *Where* we worship is secondary, he says. *How* we worship is primary.

Since Jesus has invited the woman's participation from the beginning, it's natural for her to become involved in spreading the Good News. She leaves behind her water jar, a metaphor for exhausted systems and drudgery, in her eagerness to tell her village about Jesus.

The Samaritan woman got more than she bargained for when she went to draw water. She got a life-giving spring, gushing up to eternal life. And we, too, working at the old tasks, the same routines, or the endless chores, might be surprised by a stranger.

This Week at Home



Monday, March 28 Another Water Well

The youth group at St. Edward's parish in Arlington, Virginia, challenged their parish: drink no other beverage but water for a week. No Starbucks, orange juice, alcohol, or soda pop. Give the money saved to places that desperately need clean water. (In this case, it helped their sister parish in Central America.) To honor the Samaritan woman in yesterday's Gospel, this week adopt this practice for your parish or try it yourself in your household. Then find a good place to send the funds. Today's Readings: 2 Kings 5:1–15b; Luke 4:24–30.

Tuesday, March 29 Generous Mercy

In today's Gospel, Peter wants to know just how merciful Jesus expects his disciples to be. How often must we forgive? Jesus gives a figure far beyond Peter's expectations and then tells a parable about a king who generously forgives his slave's debt. But when the slave refuses mercy to a fellow slave, the king is outraged. Receiving mercy and granting mercy are both important spiritual skills. Which of these is more difficult for you? Today's Readings: Daniel 3:25, 34–43; Matthew 18:21–35.

Wednesday, March 30 Sister Thea Bowman

On March 30, 1990, Thea Bowman died of cancer at age 53. The Catholic community lost a light, a voice, a treasure, a shining bridge between African Americans and the mainstream Church. A convert at age 10, she left her Mississippi home to become the only black sister in her order in Wisconsin. She affirmed African American Catholic spirituality through music, dance, and testimonials at the Institute of Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University, New Orleans. Thea was a blessing to all Catholics, sharing her heritage of survival and peaceful resistance, sung in gospel music. Thea earned her doctorate at Catholic University and spoke with power and eloquence to

hundreds of groups around the country. Read more in *This Little Light* by Michael O'Neill McGrath (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008). Today's Readings: Deuteronomy 4:1, 5–9; Matthew 5:17–19.

Thursday, March 31 A Home for Lent

How can we stay alert to the Lenten practices we've chosen? One way is to provide visual cues in our homes. Since Lent is about paring down, simplify your decor by putting away decorations and creating a spare look. Somewhere central, place a violet cloth (violet is Lent's liturgical color) and a crucifix or Bible. If there are children in your household, let them help you decide how Lent should look and feel in your home. Today's Readings: Jeremiah 7:23–28; Luke 11:14–23.

Friday, April 1 First of All

Lent is all about cutting away the frills and zooming in on the essentials. Today's Gospel helps us do just that as Jesus answers a scribe's question about which commandment is "first of all." Loving "the Lord your God with all your heart . . . soul . . . mind, and . . . strength" isn't easy for us distracted humans. What helps you to follow this commandment? If there are children in your household, they may have especially interesting answers to share. Today's Readings: Hosea 14:2–10; Mark 12: 28–34.

Saturday, April 2 Finding Your Truest Self in Prayer

Today's Gospel is Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector praying in the temple. The first is impressed with himself and reminds God of all his achievements. The second doesn't dare approach but merely repeats, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." How do you pray? Today, try resting in silence, allowing God's greatness to fill your emptiness. Today's Readings: Hosea 6:1–6; Luke 18:9–14.



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 Keeping the Seasons

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