

3rd Sunday of Lent (A)
(Exodus 17:3-7 / John 4:5-42)
08.03.2026
The Samaritan woman

Dear brothers and sisters,

As members of the Church engaged on the synodal pathway, we are invited to enter into Spirit-led conversations with each other in order to share what God is saying to us, and to listen as others share with us what the Lord is saying to them.

But how do we enter into conversation with others in the right way, without arrogance or a sense of superiority, without saying to ourselves: I know everything and have nothing to receive from others. I come to challenge others, not to be challenged

In today's gospel passage – the well-known encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman – Jesus shows us how to enter into conversation with others in the right way – properly disposed for the conversation. Jesus' ministry involved walking from town to town, visiting people and preaching the Good News of the better world God desires for all. On his journey from Judaea to Galilee, Jesus had to pass through Samaria. He arrives at the small village of Sychar, tired by his journey. Jesus needs to rest and is thirsty. It is midday. The sun is at its zenith and it is very warm. Jesus sits down at Jacob's well, but he has nothing with which to draw water. There is nobody around. At that hour everybody is at home taking shelter from the heat. Jesus needs rest and water to drink. In other words, Jesus needs help. To quote a psalm, Jesus is "poor and needy" and there is nobody around. He is alone. His disciples had gone to town to buy some food. To be needy and poor, to need help, this is the right disposition to enter into fruitful conversation with others, anxious to listen and receive, and eventually ready to speak.

Soon, an unknown, nameless, Samaritan woman arrives at the well. She too is poor and needy. She comes to quench her thirst at the spring in the well. Quite spontaneously, Jesus enters into conversation with her. Jesus said to her: "Give me a drink"! This is amazing! Jesus asks help from a Samaritan woman without any air of superiority of the sort proper to Jews before Samaritans, whom they considered to be unclean and contemptible people. Moreover, Jesus – a man on his own – asks help from an unknown woman, without the arrogance of men toward women. This is something unimaginable in Israel.

There is a great lesson for us here. If we want to enter into conversation with others with the right disposition of heart, we have to present ourselves in truth: humble, needy, thirsty, eventually bored or hurt by life, full of honest questions and without ready-made answers to questions that nobody is asking!

Jesus enters into a life-giving conversation with the woman. As the encounter progresses, Jesus reveals to the woman that he knows her story and helps her to know herself better. From her side of the conversation the woman discovers who Jesus is: a prophet, the Messiah, the Christ.

Today's gospel passage is one of the three baptismal catecheses from St John's gospel we read during our Lenten Sunday Eucharists. They have been chosen to offer teaching for the neophytes who will be baptised during the Easter vigil. Today we have read the encounter of the Samaritan woman with Jesus which concentrates on the symbol of water which is constitutive of the sacrament of baptism. Next Sunday, we shall read the healing of the blind man with the symbol of the light which is so present in the baptismal liturgy. And in a couple of weeks' time, we shall read the resurrection of Lazarus with the victory of life over death, a fundamental element of our baptismal faith.

Today, in the narrative of the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman, Jesus plays on two semantic levels: 'the water' which quenches our thirst and 'the spring of living water': "Whoever drinks this water that I shall give will never be thirsty again". This living water is a gift of Jesus. Jesus gave it to us when he died on the cross: water and blood flowed from his side. Water and blood! When we were born, blood and water accompanied our birth. So, the symbol of living water evokes birth and new life. On the day of our baptism, we were born again to new and eternal life, life with Christ, life with the Holy Spirit. Indeed, in the gospel of John, the spring of living water is identified with the Holy Spirit: "From his heart shall flow streams of living water. He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed were to receive" (Jn 7:38-39).

The symbol of water also evokes other meanings. Water quenches our thirst, not only our physical thirst but our spiritual thirst that originates in the depth of our being, and that is nothing other than the thirst of God. Water also washes us clean: our sins are forgiven. On the day of our baptism, we were immersed in water, or at least a few drops of water were poured on our head, with the words: "I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit". On the day of our baptism, we were born to new life, our thirst of God was quenched, and our sins forgiven.

Today's gospel is an invitation to examine our conscience on the way we live our baptismal vocation.

Since our baptism, **are we** living a new life with Jesus and the Holy Spirit, listening to Jesus and doing his will, faithful to God's covenant of love with us?

When we are thirsty or hungry, do we come to Jesus to be fed and to have our thirst quenched, or do we turn towards deceptive food and drink? At first sight, these may look satisfying, but in fact they are not. Only Christ can fulfil our hunger and quench our thirst.

When we are stained by sin, do we come to Jesus to be washed, made clean and forgiven? Or do we try to save ourselves?

On this third Sunday of Lent, let us allow the grace of our baptism to be rekindled and to be brought to new life within us and among us!