

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent + 8 March 2026 + Ex 17:3-7 + Rom 5:1-8 + John 4:5-42

Today and for the following 2 Sundays, the Church proclaims 3 (lengthy!) Gospels that were specifically chosen for the “elect”; that is, those who are preparing to receive the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist at Easter. But in fact, these Gospels are important not only for the Elect, but for all of us, helping to lead us into a deeper relationship with the Lord Jesus. In each of these Gospels, Jesus makes a revelation about Himself: a revelation that calls for our response of faith. Today, we heard Jesus reveal that He is the Messiah, and *living water*. Next Sunday, that He is the *light of the world*. And in 2 weeks, that He is *the resurrection and the life*.

So let’s look at today’s Gospel in more detail. Every detail in the life of Christ is important. But especially in John’s Gospel, no detail is insignificant. First, just one verse before our Gospel begins, it says that “Jesus *had to* pass through Samaria.” So the meeting with the Samaritan woman was not a chance encounter; Jesus was looking for her. Even more, the timing was not coincidental. Remember, Israel is a hot, arid climate, so people avoid working at noon. So the fact that the woman goes *by herself at noon* to fetch water already reveals that she is a social outcast—the details of which will be uncovered soon enough.

And then we hear Jesus initiate a conversation. Now, this is a big deal; unrelated men and women did not talk to each other at that time, especially if the woman was alone. Even more, Jews and Samaritans, we hear, *had nothing in common*, because Samaritans had intermarried with foreign idol worshippers, so Jews considered them to be unclean. So why then is Jesus going out of His way, breaking every social norm, to talk to this woman? Well, He was thirsty. But not for water: He could have gotten water for Himself. He asks the woman for water because He wants to *give her living water*. This “living water” is the Holy Spirit—a *spring of water welling up to eternal life*—and it is a gift only God can give.

But the woman is on her guard. Given the fact that she has to get water all alone, we can guess she must be rather street smart to get by on her own. So she challenges Jesus: she wants to know the source of His water. And that’s a great question, because it allows Jesus to eventually make a big revelation—to a Samaritan of all people—that He is the Messiah! But in order to prove His identity to the woman, Jesus tells her *everything she has done*: she has had 5 husbands, not including her current mate. She is obviously thirsting for something much deeper than water; that is, for authentic love.

Now it would be interesting to consider here what would be going on in the heart of the woman. But we’ll hold off on that for a moment, because the text shows that, surprisingly, what is foremost on her mind was a question of religion: of how to correctly worship God. And what Jesus reveals here is truly good news for her, and in fact for us too. That is, through this very conversation, Jesus is beginning to break down the barrier between Jew

and Gentile forever. Through Him, all people, Jews and Gentiles alike, will be able to worship God rightly—in *spirit and in truth*, and be His children. In fact, Jesus says the Father *seeks such people to worship him*. We might say that the Father *thirsts* for souls to worship Him and Him alone. Meaning, to give up false worship that only leads to more thirst: to perpetual unhappiness and eventually to slavery, and instead to finally be satisfied by His perfect love. And this woman, this “thirsty” sinner, is one of the first people not only to hear this good news, but even more, to believe it! And she can’t keep this good news to herself. She has to share it—she evangelizes her fellow townspeople—the very ones who probably had ostracized her as a sinner—and they too come to believe.

Now, I’m going to skip over the dialogue with Jesus’ disciples, and conclude our meditation on how we can apply this experience of the Samaritan woman to our own lives today. Objectively speaking, yes, this woman probably was a sinner: she had had 5 husbands and was currently living with another man. Subjectively speaking, she was also probably a very wounded soul. Maybe her husbands all deserted her, maybe she was thirsting for love her whole life but unable to find it, maybe she was shunned by her own people, maybe she felt cut off from God. And then, along comes a stranger, a male Jew, who not only talks to her, but reveals to her, her own heart! And then, instead of trying to take advantage of her, He offers her true love: a pure disinterested gift, which will finally satisfy her thirst.

One of the most difficult challenges we face in the Church today is division: some people are absolutely convinced that we are too judgmental, that we talk too much about sin, and we drive people away. Others say we are too lax, that we are silent on certain issues out of fear of being unpopular. But I think Jesus shows us a way forward in this Gospel. That is, He doesn’t ignore the woman’s sin and simply say “I’m ok, you’re ok, go on your way.” But He knows her sinful actions are only symptoms of a much deeper kind of “heart disease.” That she is really thirsting for God; the only One who can truly satisfy our souls, and tragically, she doesn’t know God’s love. St. Paul says in our 2<sup>nd</sup> reading today that the Holy Spirit *is* the love of God poured into our hearts. That’s Who we are all, in fact, thirsting for: true love, eternal love. We are thirsting for the Holy Spirit: for living water, the very gift of God Himself. And Jesus meets her, alone, in the heat of the day, and offers her this Water.

Anyone who doesn’t know the Lord is dying of thirst for His eternal love. And if we truly love others, we may sometimes have to help them see their thirst, which is usually manifested by sin. But we also can never condemn, but offer living water: God’s love, and mercy. This is why the Samaritan woman is a perfect model for us as we “scrutinize” our own hearts. Having finally been offered perfect love, she receives it. And then she also shares this life-changing good news with everyone else who, like her, is still thirsting for God.