

## Third Sunday of Lent, Cycle A

Exodus 17:3-7; Romans 5:1-2, 5-8; and John 4:5-42

Have you ever mapped your faith journey? In creating a timeline of key moments when your relationship with God shifted, it can be gratifying to realize how much you have grown and how God keeps engaging with you on deeper and deeper levels. It also helps to see where and how you got stuck – in despair, in bad habits, in laziness or pride – and how God pulled you out. This timeline is the story of your conversion. After all, the purpose of life is not anything in this world but rather full communion with God in the next. This life is about evolving into that union.

Lent provides an opportunity to reflect on our faith journey. Are we stuck? Where is God appearing to us, poking at us, offering us more love? Let us use the readings for the Third Sunday of Lent to reflect.

In Exodus, the Israelites grumble about the lack of water. In a wonderful example of passive aggressiveness, they sarcastically question Moses, "Why did you ever make us leave Egypt? Was it just to have us die here of thirst with our children and our livestock?" Really, folks? The Egyptians enslaved you for hundreds of years with conditions getting worse and worse. God defeated the invincible Pharaoh with ten plagues and wiped out his army, while you were allowed to walk through the Red Sea and now you think God can't handle the water supply? You accuse God of having evil intentions? What's more, this particular incident occurs after two similar incidents, where God sweetened a bitter water supply with a stick and God began delivering manna and quail on a daily basis in just the right amounts and promised to do so for forty years. How much more proof do the Israelites need of God's gracious compassion and awesome might?

How much more proof do we need? We have thousands of years of stories of God treating humans with compassion. We have countless stories from our own lives of God sending us loving people who shelter us, support us and bring us joy. God has given us fortitude and creativity to get through tough times, courage to forgive. God has showered us with generosity and enabled us to do likewise. Yet we run up against a new problem and we are all over God in our prayers, "How can you do this to me? How do you expect me to get through this?" True, trust does take time to grow, but really, hasn't God earned it already?

In Romans, Paul certainly thinks so: "God proves God's love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Thus it is that we have peace with God, grace to stand in and hope that will not disappoint. All this, because God is making overtures to us all the time. Our conversion is always God's initiative.

The gospel story of the Woman at the Well masterfully encapsulates God's initiative and the whole, beautiful process of conversion that ensues. (Note: this usually happens over a lifetime.) The Samaritan woman, in the course of an ordinary day, finds a Jew at her well, asking for a drink. She notices this unusual event and is offered an entry point to God. She is practical and literal at first in her responses because it takes her a bit to recognize the opportunity before her, that this could be more than just another trip to the well. When she does – "Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty." – Jesus can begin to challenge her life choices. He does not reject her for sinful choices, but insists on naming them, presumably so she can change them. Once this step takes place, the woman is ready to examine her relationship with God. Jesus states that the Samaritans, the descendants of exiles who never completely gave up the gods of their homelands, did not worship God properly. The Jews were closer to the mark because they had been the vehicle for God's self-revelation, but they misunderstood God as well. Now, in Jesus, God is made clear. Ah, the woman connects this with Dt 18:18, where the Messiah will be like Moses, giving the people direct knowledge of God. It is fascinating that the woman would have had these deep theological questions about valid worship and the way to gauge religious truth, but don't we all? We wonder about who God is and the best way to know God. Our hearts are made for union with God; allowing that to evolve is the most natural thing for us to do. The woman leaves her water jar and goes back to the village to evangelize. She has received the living water and has no need to drink again. She will now provide for others the unusual event that can become an entry point to God.

- ❖ Recognize all the ways God has been your savior. Let that knowledge reassure you in whatever difficulty you are currently facing.
- ❖ Where is Jesus showing up in your life right now, inviting you into deeper conversion?