

Bible Study

Third Sunday of Lent, cycle A

Opening Prayer: (Sign of the Cross) “Lord our God, each year you give us this holy season of Lent in order that we might examine our lives and allow you to draw us into deeper union with yourself. Open our ears to hear your word, our hearts to receive it, and our lives to put it into practice. We ask this in the name of our Savior, Jesus the Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

Focusing Questions

1. Tell about a time when you were extremely thirsty.
2. Tell about a person (besides God) whose presence has been life-giving for you?

Commentary before the First Reading: Exodus 17:3-7

How ironic! After several generations of slavery in Egypt and after being rescued by God through a whole series of miracles, the Israelites are suddenly wishing they were back in slavery where they at least had water to drink! They are questioning God’s commitment to his promises to them. The root word for “Meribah” means “to quarrel;” the root word for “Massah” means “to test.” Hence, the double name for this location. Amazingly, God’s response to their complaining was simply to love them and show them where they could find water.

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. Do you think it was sinful for the Israelites to doubt God in this situation? Explain.
2. How did Moses react to the people’s complaining? What does that show about *his* faith?
3. Which words from verses 5 and 6 hold God’s assurance that he has not abandoned his people?
4. Why is the staff so important from the people’s perspective? (see Exodus 14:16). Of what would it have reminded them and in what way was this situation similar?

Commentary before the Second Reading: Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

In spite of what we sometimes may think, Christianity is not a set of rules that tell us how we are supposed to live. Christianity is about being who we are because of what our loving God has already done for us. A frequent theme in Saint Paul’s letters is that we are adopted sons and daughters of God, not because we somehow earned it or deserve it, but because God loved us so much that he took us as his own anyway. The self-giving death of Jesus is proof of God’s love for us. Christianity is nothing more than a response to being so unbelievably loved.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. Which word(s) could we insert in place of “justified” in this text without changing its meaning?
2. According to Saint Paul, how do we know that our hope of eternal happiness is not unrealistic?
3. Saint Paul says, “Christ died for the ungodly.” What? Christ died for **us**! In what sense are we “ungodly”?
4. What point does this reading make about God, which is the very same point made in the First Reading?

Commentary before the Gospel Reading: John 4:5-42

For the next 3 Sundays we depart from the usual cycle A lectionary readings from Gospel of Matthew in order to hear three important stories from the Gospel of John. This first one asks us to consider: “For what do we thirst? And how have we been trying to quench that thirst?” Jesus is the living water, the only one that can quench the deep thirst for life that every person experiences.

Read the Gospel Reading out loud.

1. Share your favorite word or a phrase spoken by Jesus to the Samaritan woman.
2. All of the other women in the town would have come to draw their water from the well early in the morning, before the heat of the day. What does that tell us about this woman who comes at noon – alone?
3. Jesus broke 2 social norms by asking the woman for some water. Looking at verse 9, can you tell which 2 norms he broke?
4. For what did this woman unknowingly thirst and finally now experience quenching?
5. We can safely assume that Jesus did not bring up the woman’s past in order to condemn her or to make her feel guilty. So, then, why does he do it?
6. Does your Bible have a footnote that explains the meaning of “in Spirit and in truth” from verse 23?

Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives

1. What is the living water that Jesus promises and of which each of us has already drunk?
2. Forgiveness is an undeserved gift from God. Can you name other “undeserved” or “unearned” gifts that you have received?
3. Would you say that human beings are fundamentally rebellious toward God, incapable by our very nature of obeying and loving Him without his help?
4. Is there any sin that God will not or cannot forgive?
5. Can you tell about a time when you doubted God’s existence or God’s love, or at least God’s intentions? What did you learn from that experience?
6. Which action by the Samaritan woman reveals the true depth of her conversion? How could we imitate her example?
7. For what do you most thirst now– not physically, as for water, but rather for what do you long that has so far been unattained in your life?
8. How would your life be different if you tried to love everyone else as unconditionally as God loves you, if you did everything with no strings attached, expecting nothing in return? How could you attempt that this week in a specific way?

Closing Prayer (a paraphrase of a portion of Psalm 51) Rescue us,

Have mercy on us in your goodness, Lord God, and rescue us. For we know our offenses; against you alone have we sinned. Turn away your face from our sins and blot out all our guilt. Cleanse us that we may be pure. Create for us a clean heart, and renew in us a faithful spirit. Teach us wisdom. Then our tongues will praise your healing power and we will hear again the sounds of joy and gladness. Rescue us, O God, O saving God. Amen.
(Sign of the Cross)