

3rd Sunday of Lent

Exodus 17:3-7

Moses led the Jews out of Egypt and today's reading describes events which took place just before the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai, about three months after they left Egypt—very early in the Exodus.¹¹

³In those days, in their thirst for water, the people grumbled against Moses, saying, “Why did you ever make us leave Egypt? Was it just to have us die here of thirst with our children and our livestock?” The thirst of the people is just a backdrop for criticizing the value of the Exodus. This is really a rejection of the divine plan.³ The people grumble against Moses but their quarrel is really with God.¹¹

⁴So Moses cried out to the Lord, “What shall I do with this people? A little more and they will stone me!”

⁵The Lord answered Moses, “Go over there in front of the people, along with some of the elders of Israel, holding in your hand, as you go, the staff with which you struck the river. This is the same staff that turned into a serpent, and was used to bring forth the plagues of frogs and gnats, turn the Nile into blood, and part the Red Sea.¹¹

⁶I will be standing there in front of you on the rock in Horeb. “Horeb” is a general name for the mountain range that runs through the region. Sinai is one of its peaks. The name is used interchangeably with Sinai.¹¹ Strike the rock, and the water will flow from it for the people to drink.” This Moses did, This event is recalled in several other places in the Bible and it even adds that Moses himself lacked faith and struck the rock twice. Lack of trust in the goodness and power of God is a grave sin against faith. When we meet some contradiction or difficulty we cannot immediately solve, our faith may waver but we should never doubt because if deliberately cultivated, doubt can lead to spiritual blindness.² in the presence of the elders of Israel. From this incident, later rabbis were to build a legend that the rock source of this providential water followed the Israelites through the desert.¹ St. Paul used this story to explain the Eucharist: the fellowship of the Christian with Christ and that Christ was present to nourish them with his own substance.(1 Cor 10:4)

⁷The place was called Massah Massah means “testing.” and Meribah, Meribah means “quarrelling.”¹ because the Israelites quarreled there and tested the Lord, saying, “Is the Lord in our midst or not?”

Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

This was written in 57 or 58 AD when Paul was in Corinth. He wrote to the church in Rome, which he hoped to visit. This letter, which was Paul's longest and considered by many to be his most important, introduced the Apostle and gave him a chance to clarify some misunderstandings that were prevalent.¹⁰

Brothers and sisters: Paul has previously discussed HOW we have been justified. Now he reflects on the EFFECTS of justification.⁹

¹Since we have been justified by faith, Justification is conferred in baptism.⁷ (CCC 1992) It reconciles us with God and frees us from the enslavement to sin, and it heals.⁷ (CCC 1990) As Richard White explains it, justification is our becoming sons and daughters of God. The Council of Trent defined justification as a transition from that state in which a person is born as a child of the

first Adam to the state of grace and of adoption as children of God through the second Adam, Jesus Christ our savior.¹⁰ **we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God.** Boasting is a common topic in Paul's letters. People in his time had much the same opinion about boasting that well-mannered people do today: don't do it unless you boast of someone or something for which you do not take the credit yourself. So Paul is saying, do not boast that you are justified, but that God justified you together with the rest of the church.¹²

5And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. To love God is entirely a gift of God. He, without being loved, loves us and *enabled* us to love him. We were loved when we were still displeasing to him, so that we might be given something whereby we might please him.⁸

6For Christ, while we were still helpless, died at the appointed time for the ungodly. Before the sacrifice of Christ, no one was justified and could do nothing to enable them to appear morally right before God.¹¹ Christianity is not about what we are supposed to do. It is about what has already been done for us by a loving God. Notice how all this is in the past tense. It has happened. It's a given. Sometimes we are asked, "Have you been saved?" Yes, we have. Have we accepted the salvation granted us out of pure love? Do we believe God loves us infinitely and without reserve? The more we come to believe it, the more spontaneous and joyous our response to love will be. Good works are done not in the hope of earning God's favor. We already have that. Rather, good works express our gratitude!¹³

7Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person, though perhaps for a good person one might even find courage to die.

8But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. There is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer.⁷ (CCC 605) If Christ gave himself up to death for those who were unbelievers and enemies of God, how much more will he protect us with his help if we believe in him!! He died for us in order to obtain life and glory for us. So if he died for his enemies, just think what he will do for his friends!¹¹

John 4:5-42

This event happened very early in Jesus' public ministry: immediately after his baptism, the wedding feast at Cana, and his encounter with Nicodemus, all of which have baptismal significance.¹¹

5Jesus came to a town of Samaria The Samaritans were Israelites who escaped exile when Assyria conquered the Northern Kingdom eight centuries before Christ. They were despised for intermarrying with non-Israelites and worshipping at Mount Gerazim, not Jerusalem.⁴ **called Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.** Jacob was the son of Isaac, twin brother of Esau, and the grandson of Abraham.¹⁴

6Jacob's well was there. Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down there at the well. It was about noon. The setting recalls the marital arrangements described in the Pentateuch. As the wives of Isaac, Jacob, and Moses were first encountered at a well, so Jesus is the divine bridegroom in search of believers to be his covenant bride.⁵

7A woman of Samaria came to draw water. The woman probably came at mid-day to avoid meeting people because of her reputation.¹⁵ Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” Jesus makes this request not just because of his physical thirst but because his love made him thirst for the salvation of all men. When nailed to the Cross he again said, “I thirst.”⁶ The CCC says that prayer is the encounter of God’s thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him.⁷

8His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.

9The Samaritan woman said to him, “How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?” --For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans. — The Jews considered the Samaritans, and therefore their utensils for eating and drinking, unclean.¹³ The enmity between Jews and Samaritans was very much alive in NT times, and both groups took steps to avoid interaction with one another, especially in matters of food and drink. Jesus oversteps the boundaries of Jewish tradition which discouraged men from conversing with women in public, sharing a drink with a Samaritan and associating with a recognized sinner.⁵

10Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God Jesus himself is the gift.¹³ and who is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” Jesus is speaking of the life and vitality of the Spirit. Christian tradition associates living water with baptismal waters, which lead us to “eternal life.”⁵

11The woman said to him, “Sir, This is a respectful term of address but as the episode progresses, the perception of Jesus’ identity becomes ever more clear for in verse 19 he is a “prophet, by 29 he is the “Christ” and in 42 he is the “Savior of the world.”⁵ you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep; where then can you get this living water? The woman takes Jesus literally. She thinks he is talking about flowing water rather than water from a well or cistern. Jesus uses this misunderstanding as an opportunity for further teaching.¹¹

12Are you greater than our father Jacob, The Samaritans also claimed descent from the patriarchs.¹¹ who gave us this cistern and drank from it himself with his children and his flocks?”

13Jesus answered and said to her, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again;

14but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” Christ is referring to the change worked in every person by sanctifying grace, a share in God’s own life, the presence of the Holy Spirit in the soul, the great gift that those who believe in him will receive. A person who receives our Lord and remains united to him as a branch to the vine will not only slake his thirst but will become a well of living water himself.⁶

15The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.” The woman still misunderstands.¹¹

16Jesus said to her, “Go call your husband and come back.” The Hebrew word for husband is *baal* which also means “lord”.¹³

17The woman answered and said to him, “I do not have a husband.” Jesus answered her “You are right in saying, ‘I do not have a husband.’

18For you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true.” The five husbands of the woman may represent the false gods that Samaria had followed; thus Samaria’s current relationship with God is not proper, that is, she has no husband. The five husbands may also be a symbol for the five books of the Torah, which was the whole Samaritan Bible; Jesus is calling her to a new marriage with a new law.¹³

19The woman said to him, “Sir, I can see that you are a prophet. The Samaritans held only the first five books of the Bible to be sacred because they rejected the prophets who did not speak kindly of them. The only prophet they accepted was the one who was to come as promised in Deuteronomy 18:15-19. She is really saying that Jesus is The Prophet.¹¹ Her conversion has begun.

20Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain; but you people say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem.”

21Jesus said to her, “Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. This “hour” is the “appointed time” that Paul speaks of in today’s Epistle.⁴ With the coming of the Messiah, whom both Samaritans and Jews are awaiting, the true dwelling-place of God among men is in Jesus.⁶

22You people worship what you do not understand; Samaritan religion was an admixture of Israelite faith and pagan idolatry. Jesus speaks from the perspective of the OT which describes idol worship as ignorant worship.⁵ we worship what we understand, because salvation is from the Jews. The Messiah was expected to come from the line of King David, who belonged to the royal tribe of Judah.⁵

23But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the father in Spirit and truth; Christian worship contrasts with Jewish and Samaritan worship. It will be in spirit, not confined to a single Israelite sanctuary where the ritual sacrifice of animals has continued since the days of Moses. It will also be in truth, not tainted by the errors of idolatry that have plagued the Samaritans since the days of the divided kingdom.⁵ and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him.

24God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth.”

25The woman said to him, “I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Christ; when he comes, he will tell us everything.”

26Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one speaking with you.” Jesus accepts the title “Messiah” only here and at his trial.⁵ There is no Greek word for “he” so by using the words, “I am”, Jesus evokes the words of Yahweh when he revealed himself to Moses, and on the lips of Jesus they indicate not only that he is the Messiah, but also that he is divine.⁶

27At that moment his disciples returned, and were amazed that he was talking with a woman, but still no one said, “What are you looking for?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

28The woman left her water jar St. Augustine wrote that the water jar is the fallen desire of man that draws pleasure from the dark wells of the world but is never satisfied for long. Conversion to Christ moves us, like the Samaritan woman, to renounce the world, leave behind the desire of our earthen vessels, and follow a new way of life.⁵ and went into the town and said to the people,

29“Come see a man who told me everything I have done. Could he possibly be the Christ?” After the woman goes off to the town, the topic becomes evangelization and mission. This may reflect the experience of the early church, which had quick success in Samaria because others (Jesus, the woman, other disciples?) had prepared the harvest.¹³

30They went out of the town and came to him.

31Meanwhile, the disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat.”

32But he said to them, “I have food to eat of which you do not know.”

33So the disciples said to one another, “Could someone have brought him something to eat?”

34Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work. The Father’s will is always the driving force behind Jesus’ mission.⁵

35 Do you not say, 'In four months the harvest will be here'? It takes four months from planting to harvest.¹¹ I tell you, look up and see the fields ripe for the harvest. This suggests that the world in general and the Samaritans in particular were ripe and ready to be gathered by the missionary efforts of the Church.⁵

36 The reaper is already receiving payment and gathering crops for eternal life, so that the sower and reaper can rejoice together.

37 For here the saying is verified that 'One sows and another reaps.'

38 I sent you to reap what you have not worked for; others have done the work, and you are sharing the fruits of their work." The Apostles will reap what was generously sown by the Patriarchs and Prophets and especially by Christ. And they in their turn must prepare the ground, with the same generosity, so that others can later reap the harvest. This also applies to all the faithful who have different gifts which they should use in the work of the Gospel, each according to his opportunity, ability, charism and ministry.⁶

39 Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me everything I have done."

40 When the Samaritans came to him, they invited him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days.

41 Many more began to believe in him because of his word,

42 and they said to the woman, "We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world."

This is a title for Jesus and salvation is for all the nations of the world.

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (2) "The Navarre Bible: Pentateuch," (3) "The Collegeville Bible Commentary," (4) "Breaking the Bread," Feb. 2005 Publication of the St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology, (5) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of John" by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (6) "The Navarre Bible: St. John," (7) "Catechism of the Catholic Church," (8) "The Navarre Bible: Romans And Galatians," (9) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers; 1999" by Lawrence E. Mick, (10) "Catholic for a Reason": Justification As Divine Sonship" by Richard A. White, (11) St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology Online Founded by Dr. Scott Hahn, (12) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: Year A" by James L. Weaver, (13) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: Year A" by Aelred R. Rosser, (14) "Dictionary of the Bible" by John L. McKenzie, S.J., and (15) "The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study" by Deacon Ken and Marie Finn.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.