

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

EXODUS 17:3-7; ROMANS 5:1-2, 5-8; JN4:5-42

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In the chapters immediately before the first reading from the book of Exodus, Israel has been freed from the oppression of the Pharaoh by miracles (the passover). Then when Pharaoh pursues them with his army, and they are sure they will be dead, God rescues them and destroys Pharaoh's army by the miraculous passage through the Red Sea. Once they are free, they worry about food, and God provides them with Manna. So now, you would think they had learned to trust in God. But no, as soon as there is a shortage of water, they once again lose hope. In the words of the reading, the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst." They forget His loving hand. You might think that God would get fed up with them, but he knows that growing in trust is a long process. He does the impossible once again, he has Moses strike the rock and water comes out of it. Do we not, too, despite all the good that God has bestowed on us, often forget that we can rely on Him and on His loving care? It is important that we keep reminding ourselves of His goodness to us and His faithfulness throughout our lives.

As I prayed, again, the story of the Samaritan woman, what struck me this time is that God calls us, and calls us to bring Him to others, even when we are far less than he calls us to be. She is at the well in the middle of a hot day, far from other sources of water, because she is a moral outcast. She has looked for happiness in the wrong places, and she knows it, and Jesus knows it. "You are right in saying you have no husband, for you have had five husbands and the one you have now is not your husband." She is an outcast both to herself and to others. She is ready for something else. She wants to make her peace with God. She begins to talk of where she must worship. It is to her that Jesus reveals that he is the Messiah and that a new order is at hand. And so she braves the people of her village, outcast that she is, so that they might know the hope she has found, and somehow she leads them to meet Jesus and finally to believe in Him. He has brought them the spiritual water that will lead them to eternal life and she was his messenger. We are all called to do what we can even when we know we are sinners.

Although St. John doesn't give us her name, the Orthodox Church celebrates her as a Saint and a Martyr on March 20. Her name in Russian is Svetlana.

St. Paul in the letter to the Romans, speaks of the hope, to which we are called. "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God." He reminds us that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." And we can be sure of God's love because, "...while we still were sinners, Christ died for us." I would add, knowing that we would be faced with temptation, and that sometimes we would fall, he still loves us and encourages us to advance into the fullness of His grace and love.

May God continue to bless our efforts to grow in our relationships with him during this season of Lent.

Rev J. Schuck S.J.