

**THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT; Cycle – A; March 12<sup>th</sup> 2023**  
**Exodus 17: 3-7; Romans 5: 1, 5-8; John 4: 5-42**

Dear Sisters & Brothers

In the original setting, the Lent was begun in the Church with two dimensions; first of all this is a period in which the churches prepared the catechumens for the Sacrament of baptism and secondly, the lent renews the baptismal promises of the already baptized. But in course of time when infant baptism became common in the Church, we find a little deviation from this original purpose and more emphasis being given to the spiritual conversion of the faithful as a preparation to commemorate the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. But Vat. II rediscovered the original intention of the Lenten period without diminishing the importance of the salvific mission of Jesus which he attained through his death and resurrection. During this period, especially in the Western Church, this is a time for **Rite of Christian Initiation for the Adults (RCIA)** program by which the adults who are not baptized are baptized and confirmed and the ones who are already baptized, but not yet confirmed, will be confirmed on Easter vigil. In order to give the better understanding of the candidates' spiritual journey the Church presents three major theme for them through John's gospel, **such as, Christ the Living Water; Christ the Light and Christ the Life**

This Sunday we begin with the theme, “**Christ the Living Water,**” projected in the episode of the Samaritan woman. This episode is uniquely recorded in John's gospel. On his way Jesus reaches a city of Samaria, which is a Gentile territory and there he meets a Samaritan woman at the well. We have already heard the long dialogue between the woman and Jesus. As deep rooted hostility and enmity existed between the Jews and the Samaritans, we can imagine the shock of that woman, when Jesus, a Jew, asked her for a drink. No good standing Jew would communicate with Samaritans and eat or drink with them. It was the rabbinic saying, “*It is better to dine in the company of a devil rather than eating with a Samaritan.*” And also it is clear that she was morally loose and outcast in her community too. But for Jesus she was also the daughter of the same Heavenly Father who treats the righteous and wicked as His children. Jesus considered her as another lost sheep to be redeemed. So Jesus treated her to be equally important like any righteous and was eager to give her the ‘Living Water,’ which would satisfy her spiritual thirst and save her soul. Living Water, in the Biblical language is the ‘**Life giving Spirit**’ which she was lacking due to her sinful life. Jesus was offering her the same here.

At least some may wonder why Jesus chose an outcast woman whose immoral life was well known among the local Samaritans of Sychar. If wanted, Jesus could have

gone directly to the city and preached to them or chosen a prominent citizen as a mediator. But Jesus knew that this woman who was not welcomed in the gatherings would never get an opportunity even to listen to him. So he chose this woman alone and lifted her up from her shame and humiliation. And also Jesus elevated her to the higher position of an evangelizer.

Very often Jesus chose the outcasts and least important people in the society for his work. That is what we see in the selection of the apostles. And if we go back to the history we see number of such examples. In other words, he always did mighty things through the so called weakest and unwanted. Jesus chooses one, not on the basis of his/her social status, virtues, qualification and public recognition. When he chooses one what he expects from that person is only the willingness to co-operate with his plan. The Samaritan woman was very sincere and ready to open her heart to Jesus and accept the living water offered by him. She had the humility to admit her sinful state of life and the readiness to make changes in life. Her recognition of the identity of Jesus was gradual, but full; she grew slowly in her faith and reached an '*Aha!*' experience. But she didn't remain in that state of joy; rather she left behind her social barrier and ran to the town to convey the good news to the same people who labeled her an outcast.

The Samaritan woman's example shows us that faith is not a gift which we should enjoy for ourselves and hoard it; rather it should be shared with others. Each Christian is an evangelizer. The very moment when we were baptized, the seed of faith was planted in us. Later through the help of other Sacraments the seed sprouted and grew in us. Like the Samaritan woman, we too are chosen by Jesus for the mission of sharing it. And also the positive attitude of Jesus towards the Samaritan woman warns us that we should not pick and choose people and label them good or bad. God does not show any discrimination against the wicked and the righteous. Each one is dear to Him and equally important.