

## FIRST READING – A LENT 3

A reading from the book of Exodus.

**Pause – and look up at the assembly**

In the wilderness the people thirsted for water;  
and 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?”  
So Moses cried out to the Lord,  
“What shall I do with this people?  
They are almost ready to stone me.”  
The Lord said to Moses,  
“Go on ahead of the people,  
and take some of the elders of Israel with you;  
take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go.  
I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb.  
Strike the rock, and water will come out of it,  
so that the people may drink.”  
Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.  
He called the place Massah and Meribah,  
because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the Lord,  
saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?” .

Horeb = HOH-reb

Massah = MASS-uh

Meribah = MEHR-ih-buh

**Pause for THREE seconds**

**then look up at the people**

**and say SLOWLY:**

The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## **SECOND READING – A LENT 3**

A reading from the letter of Saint Paul to the Romans.

**Pause – and look up at the assembly**

Brothers and sisters:

Since we are supported by faith,  
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.  
And hope does not disappoint us,  
because God's love has been poured into our hearts  
through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.  
For while we were still weak,  
at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.  
Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a good person –  
though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die.  
But God proves his love for us  
in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

**Pause for THREE seconds**  
**then look up at the people**  
**and say SLOWLY:**

The WORD of the LORD.

*Thanks be to God.*

## GOSPEL READING – A LENT 3

The Lord be with you.

*And with your spirit.*

A reading from the holy gospel according to John.

*Glory to you, O Lord*

Jesus came to a Samaritan city called Sychar,  
near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.  
Jacob's well was there,  
and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well.  
It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water,  
and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."  
(His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)  
The Samaritan woman said to him,  
"How is it that you, a Jew,  
ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?"  
(Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her,  
"If you knew the gift of God,  
and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,'  
you would have asked him,  
and he would have given you living water."

The woman said to him,  
"Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep.  
Where do you get that living water?  
Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well,  
and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"

Jesus said to her,  
"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,  
but those who drink of the water that I will give them  
will never be thirsty.

The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water  
gushing up to eternal life."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water,  
so that I may never be thirsty  
or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back."  
The woman answered him, "I have no husband."

Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband';  
for you have had five husbands,  
and the one you have now is not your husband.  
What you have said is true!"



## **GOSPEL READING (CTD.) – A LENT 3**

The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.”

Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” The woman said to him, “I know that the Messiah is coming” (who is called the Christ).

“When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.”

Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

Just then his disciples came.

They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?”

Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city.

She said to the people, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?”

They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.”

But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.”

So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?”

Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.



## **GOSPEL READING (CTD.) – A LENT 3**

Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’?  
But I tell you, look around you,  
and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting.  
The reaper is already receiving wages  
and is gathering fruit for eternal life,  
so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.  
For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’  
I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour.  
Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour.”

Many Samaritans from that city believed in Jesus  
because of the woman’s testimony,  
“He told me everything I have ever done.”  
So when the Samaritans came to him,  
they asked him to stay with them;  
and he stayed there two days.  
And many more believed because of his word.  
They said to the woman,  
“It is no longer because of what you said that we believe,  
for we have heard for ourselves,  
and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

*Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.*

## SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

The purpose of the Lenten readings is to prepare for the participation in the paschal feast.

The Old Testament readings focus upon salvation history as the presupposition of, preparation for, and in some respects a prefiguring of, the redemptive act of God in Christ.

The second readings set forth our participation in the death and resurrection of Christ through baptism and in the Christian life.

The gospel readings of series A, after the accounts of the temptation and the transfiguration, which are traditional on the first two Sundays, take up the great Johannine signs, which are prefigurations both of the saving events of Christ's death and resurrection and of our participation in those saving events through baptism.

### Reading I: Exodus 17:3-7

The Revised Common Lectionary addition of verses 1-2 [Webmaster note: Revised Common Lectionary first reading is Ex 17:1-7] provides the context of the reading, explaining "where" in verse 3. Although the Lenten OT readings in all three years form an independent series highlighting important moments in Israel's salvation history, today's reading fits in very well with the Gospel, where Jesus promises the Samaritan woman the water of life.

In the dry climate of Palestine, water is an obvious symbol of salvation and the allusion to the sacraments is not far below the surface in the Johannine discourse recounted in the Gospel.

In 1 Cor 10, Paul uses the episode of the rock from Exodus 17, etc., as a type of the Christian sacrament (specifically there with reference to the eucharistic cup).

But a different emphasis in this first reading is suggested by the responsorial psalm (Ps 95:8). This psalm picks up the theme of the Israelites' hardening of their hearts during their wanderings through the wilderness: "Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness," which recalls Ex 17:7: "[Moses] called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD."

It is worth noting that the letter to the Hebrews (Heb 3:7-4:11) takes up the theme of Psalm 95 and uses it as the basis for an exhortation to the Jewish Christians at Rome. They had been Christians for more than a generation.

The first flush of their enthusiasm had worn off, and they were finding life wearisome. The author of the letter compares their situation to that of the children of Israel in the wilderness, who were also finding the going tough and were getting tired.

## Responsorial Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

This psalm is also used on the eighteenth Sunday of the year in series C. The emphasis today rests clearly on the third stanza (see the commentary on Reading I above).

## Reading II: Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

In Rom 3:21 through chapter 4, Paul explains the act of God in Christ in terms of justification. He now sums up his argument (“Since we are justified”) and unfolds its consequences: we have peace with God, we have access to grace, and we have a joyful hope of sharing the glory of God.

The ground of all this is that the Holy Spirit has been given to us. Justification and the gift of the indwelling Spirit are really one and the same thing. When a person receives the gift of the indwelling Spirit, he or she is justified. When a person is justified, he or she receives the gift of the indwelling Spirit.

In a course of lectures on justification delivered in his Anglican days and reissued many years later after he had become a Roman Catholic, John Henry Newman sought to find a via media between the Reformation and the Council of Trent on the doctrine of justification, a way that would do justice to the legitimate concerns of both sides and yet transcend the antithesis.

The interesting thing for us is that he sought it precisely in this understanding of justification as the gift of the indwelling Spirit.

On the one hand, this avoided the notion suggested by much Reformation theology that justification is no more than the external imputation of righteousness, leaving a person just as much a sinner as before, and, on the other hand, the Tridentine suggestion that justification means what it means etymologically, namely, to make just, implying that the justified person has already become righteous in a moral sense.

The Reformers were right in protesting that the justified person is still a sinner, and the Tridentine doctrine was right in asserting that justification makes a real difference.

The way out of this dilemma is suggested by Rom 5:4 (included in RCL): justification is the gift of the indwelling Spirit, which initiates a transformation into the risen state.

The (indented section) above was written for the first edition of this book, before the appearance of the Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1999) which has sought to reconcile the issues exactly along the lines proposed here.

The RCL reading [Webmaster note: RCL second reading is Rom 5:1-11] adds verses 3-4, which expand on the theme of hope introduced in verse 2 and resumed in verse 5. Hope grows out of the endurance of tribulation.

The other additional verses, 9-11, make it clear that for Paul justification marks the beginning of life in Christ, while salvation is its ultimate consummation. These verses also introduce the term “reconciliation” as an alternative metaphor for justification.

Justification is a metaphor from the courtroom, while reconciliation speaks of the resolution of personal, civil, or international conflict.

## Gospel: John 4:5-42

A multiplicity of themes jostle one another in this dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. Among them are:

- (1) Jesus' request for water, leading to the declaration that he is the giver of life;
- (2) Jesus' suggestion that the woman call her husband, leading to an exposure of her matrimonial past (which some take as an allegorical reference to the Samaritan Bible, which has only the first five books of the Old Testament);
- (3) the woman's shift of the conversation to the basic dispute between the Jews and the Samaritans—the proper place to worship YHWH—leading to Jesus pronouncement that the old Jewish-Samaritan debate is about to be transcended by worship in spirit and truth;
- (4) the woman's assurance that the dispute will be cleared up in the messianic age, leading to Jesus' declaration that he is the Messiah;
- (5) the woman's departure to fetch her friends to see Jesus, interrupted by the sixth theme and resumed later in the conversion of many Samaritans; and finally, sandwiched between the two parts of the fifth theme,
- (6) the disciples' return to Jesus and their perplexity over his refusal to eat, leading to the declaration that his food is to do his Father's will, followed by sayings about the harvest, the latter preparing the way for the Samaritan conversions.

The short form of the Gospel simplifies the discourse by omitting (2) and (6).

There are many reasons why modern scholars do not regard the Johannine discourses and dialogues as transcripts of what the earthly Jesus actually said.

There may be an original nucleus to this story, in which Jesus encountered a Samaritan woman and asked her for some water to drink, leading to some pronouncement by Jesus about the imminence of the kingdom of God.

But the original point has been lost, and the story as it now stands has been expanded to cover various topics of interest in John's church, topics that came up largely as a result of the Samaritan mission, but also topics that express the evangelist's interpretation of Jesus as the bringer of the final revelation of God.

On the whole, we must take the dialogue as a Christian meditation on the meaning of Jesus for faith: he is the bringer of salvation; he exposes human sin; he inaugurates the true worship of God, which transcends all human approaches to God and is a worship in spirit and truth, a worship based upon the gospel.

It is because Jesus is the bringer of the final revelation of God that he draws all to himself as Savior of the world.

Reginald H. Fuller