

Third Sunday of Lent

March 3, 2013

First, what is Lent all about? For some Christians, it means you turn sad for 40 days. From the ashes on your forehead to the anguished cry of Christ on the cross. For liturgy and for living, this is nonsense. We dare not divide the paschal mystery into a season of dying (Lent) and a season of rising (Easter). Jesus Christ is risen. Lent is our increasingly intense initiation into the *whole* paschal mystery – and that is the mystery of dying and rising: his and ours. One mystery: life in and through death.

Each Sunday Gospel this Lent plays on that theme, but with different images. First Sunday: the desert. The biblical desert was at once a terrible wilderness where death was ever a threat *and* the place where the people of God was born. Last Sunday: the Transfiguration. On the journey of death to Jerusalem, Jesus is revealed as the person of life. On the death march, the disciples glimpse his glory. Next Sunday: darkness and light – the man born blind. The second reading will express the miracle's deeper meaning: "Once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." The fifth Sunday: Lazarus "dead four days" called from death's cave. Here you have the promise of Jesus: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." So, too, for the sixth Sunday, Passion/Palm Sunday. Not palms *or* passion; both. Not triumph *or* tragedy; triumph *in* tragedy. Not a dying *or* a rising Christ; a dying/rising Christ. Life leaps *from* death.

Today's Gospel. How does the Samaritan woman fit into Lent, into dying/rising? As on the other Sundays, so here. When the thirsty woman wonders aloud how a Jew can ask a Samaritan for water, Jesus responds: "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." Living water is the revelation Jesus gives us, and living water is the Spirit Jesus gives us. This is what Jesus calls "the gift of God."

Two suggestions for Lent. First, it is not only Samaritans who should recognize Jesus and ask him for living water. Every woman and man must. You and I must. Somehow you and I must *know* the Christ who mesmerized the woman at the well, not only know *about* him. The kind of love where I surrender all else in wild abandon. Two people in love. What earlier Christians called a “divine and sober intoxication.”

Second, the Samaritan woman did not hide her living water. She “left her water jug” and exclaimed to all she could find: “Come, see” this amazing man! The Gospel is clear: “Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony.” The point is, she became an apostle, an evangelizer. She brought the message of Jesus to the people she knew; she shared with them her own experience; she urged them to go see for themselves. They went. They heard the word. And many believed. Because of her.

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