

How goes your Lent?

We are going deeper and deeper into our Lenten journey and so it is worth asking: how goes it? Ash Wednesday may seem a bit of a distant memory but on that day we were called upon to think and consider the needs of our spiritual selves, to look at our lives in the light of our own mortality and apply to it tasks and thoughts which would open up for us the presence and the place of God in those thoughts and tasks in order to sanctify and purify them. On the first Sunday of Lent we considered how easy it is to neglect the importance of God in what we do and say; to relegate him to the periphery of our lives, and last week we were offered the experience of a transfigured and transformed life if we centre it on God. Over the next three Sundays we will be invited to encounter Jesus in a very particular and personal way. We will meet him and be encouraged to allow him to enter our hearts and souls anew through the story of the woman at the well, the man born blind and the raising of Lazarus. In these three gospels the many facets of human desire, insight and belief are given much exposure as we progress towards the joy of Easter .

One thing for certain that we can say about the Jesus we encounter in the gospel of John, is that nothing is as it may superficially seem. A simple statement or question which may of itself appear both innocent and uncomplicated when spoken or asked, is said in order to open out much more profound and intimate thoughts and feelings. And it's the same for us. Many is the time that we may want desperately to engage in serious talk yet somehow feel constrained by awkwardness, embarrassment, or fear of being misunderstood through not knowing how to ask the right question or give the appropriate response. But Jesus won't have it. The simple request he makes of the woman at the well: *Give me a drink*, could have remained just that – a simple request – but there is something much more enquiring behind it as we soon discover. It opens up for the woman whole areas of her life concerning her relationships and her desire in a way that previously she had been unable to comprehend.

Maybe this is what our Lent is for. Maybe it should become a time and a space that we've been given, to go deeper into our selves and allow the questions that ordinarily remain superficial to get into the cracks and hollows of our faith. Doing so will lead us into realising how connected we are; that what we share is both an individual and a communal desire for love, for truth, for justice, in other words, the principles and values which bind us and secure us to each other. We need to be taught how to treasure such ideals in order that they find a secure mooring in our lives. This teaching takes us through many a tough process which expose us to shattering experiences wherein our hope is rocked and our trust broken. In essence, this is the journey we take towards Good Friday and Easter and we are asked to walk at some point through the desert where our source of water has almost dried up.

Jesus knows that this will happen to us, which is why he makes the offer he does to the woman – *anyone who drinks the water I shall give will never be thirsty again* – it's an offer he makes to us too. We are told it was about the sixth hour when Jesus, sat at the well, made his request. He'll make that same request again at another sixth hour in very different circumstances – *I thirst* - he cries from the cross on Good Friday, what have we to say in response?