

"Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."
John 4: 14

The Year of the Word: Reflection 7



At this point in our Lenten journey, our souls may be beginning to regret the challenges we have set ourselves: we may be wondering if we have made the right choice; we may be struggling to be joyful, patient and loving, so that others do not realise what our trials and tribulations, sacrifices or deeds are; we may be ready to give into temptation: we need to be refreshed; we need nourishment from God and the 'living water' of the Holy Spirit to satisfy our thirst so that we can remain loyal servants.

Through studying each of the Lent Gospel stories we are given such sustenance, we can reflect on and prepare for the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. We will be given physical and spiritual healing, and strength to allow us defiance in the face of evil, that will help us to persevere and become resourceful and resilient allowing us to continue our journey towards God. As the celebration of Easter is the cornerstone of our faith this is especially important. In our oft-troubled world it is important to hold on to hope and to find ways to allow Jesus to change our lives just as He did to many that He met when He walked the Earth.

The way we picture the Church influences our thought and actions – perhaps in this fast-paced, ever changing World, it is time to use a new model? The thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. One analogy of the Church, that might be helpful, is as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds first. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds. ... and you have to start from the ground up to ensure permanent change and success.

In John's Gospel (John 4: 5 – 4:2) a woman from Samaria, who was with living with husband number six comes to get water from Jacob's Well, here she discovers that she is loved and so she is able to respond. Today the Pope offers this invitation to us (to know we are loved) and our response is at the heart of the mission of the Church. Before all else, the Gospel invites us to respond to the God of Love who saves us, to see God in others and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others. Under no circumstance can this invitation be obscured! All of the virtues are at the service of this response of love. If this invitation does not radiate forcefully and attractively, the edifice of the Church's moral teaching risks becoming a house of cards, and this is our greatest risk; this is what had happened to the Pharisees and Sadducees, which Jesus came to change. It was not God's will that was being carried out but Man's to the benefit of the few! In today's world if the same becomes true, it would mean that it is not the Gospel which is being preached, but certain doctrinal or moral points based on specific ideological options. Then the message will run the risk of losing its freshness and will cease to have "the fragrance of the Gospel", it will not be God's will but Man's 'corrupt' will that is promoted that will not benefit all.

This Gospel passage also allows us the opportunity to reflect on the change Jesus made to people's lives and who He came to call. In the passage Jesus found time to listen to the woman at the well despite life being so busy, so rushed and the fact that she was considered unworthy. His spending time with her changed her life: Do we spend enough time listening or with others? Do we spend time with those we would usually shun or avoid? Are we judgemental of others when we haven't got the whole picture? Is this what Jesus did? Should we change? Can we go forth and meet others as Jesus did? A Church which "goes forth" is a Church whose doors are open. Going out to others in order to reach the fringes of humanity does not mean rushing out aimlessly into the world. Often it is better simply to slow down, to put aside our eagerness in order to see and listen to others, to stop rushing from one thing to another and to remain with someone who has faltered along the way. At times we have to be like the father of the prodigal son, who always keeps his door open so that when the son returns, he can readily pass through it.

Therefore this Gospel passage invites us to stand with Jesus as He speaks to the Samaritan Woman who was seen by many as a "bad" person or as an "outsider", but to God no one is excluded. You can imagine the horror of those first hearing this. Jesus offers to quench her thirst, but not in the way she thought she needed: He is welcoming her and offering a place in God's Kingdom despite who she is, what she has done or the fact that she hasn't asked. He sees the 'good' in her and gives her a chance to change. Do we fully understand what God is offering us? Do we act in the same way towards others as Jesus did or do we consider them unworthy? By the end of the Gospel the woman is asking to be given "the Living Water" that Jesus is offering so that she may "never get thirsty", she says 'I know that the Messiah – that is, Christ – is coming, and when he comes he will tell us everything.' Jesus replies 'I who am speaking to you, I am he.' She 'sees' and believes Jesus is the Messiah so she tells others of Him and brings them to meet Him: Do we do this?

The Church is the house of the Father, whose doors should always be wide open. One concrete sign of such openness is that our church doors should always be open, so that if someone, moved by the Spirit, comes there looking for God, he or she will not find a closed door. Today, many think this is not possible but can we find a way to make it so again? There are other doors that should not be closed either: Everyone can share in some way in the life of the Church; everyone can be part of the community, nor should the doors of the sacraments be closed for simply any reason. This is especially true of the sacrament which is itself "the door": baptism. The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak. These convictions have pastoral consequences that we are called to consider with prudence and boldness. Frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems.

Pope Francis asks us to reflect on how our Parish Communities are called to be places of welcome and inclusion so that all people can experience the joy of the Gospel in their lives and respond appropriately.

Pope John XXIII called a parish 'the village fountain where everyone could come and be quenched'.

"A spoonful of honey attracts more flies than a barrelful of vinegar." St Francis de Sales

How can we put this into practice as a Church, as a parish and as individuals?
How is our Parish Community a place of rest and refreshment for those on the journey of life?
How could it be more so?
What can we do during Lent to ensure others feel welcome?
How can we find an opportunity to have a conversation with someone about Jesus this week?
Who could I bring with me to Mass at Easter this year?



Readings for Reflection from the Gospels

John 4: 5 – 4:2: The Woman at the Well
Matthew 25: 34 – 40
Luke 15: 11 – 32: The Prodigal Son
Mark 12: 1 – 12: The Parable of the Tenants

Matthew 25:34 – 40

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?'



Prayer

Mary,
Virgin of listening and contemplation,
Mother of love,
Bride of the eternal wedding feast,
pray for the Church,
whose pure icon you are,
that she may never be closed in on herself
or lose her passion for establishing God's kingdom.
Star of the new evangelisation,
help us to bear radiant witness to communion,
service, ardent and generous faith, justice and love of the poor,
that the joy of the Gospel may reach to the ends of the earth.
Mother of the living Gospel, pray for us.

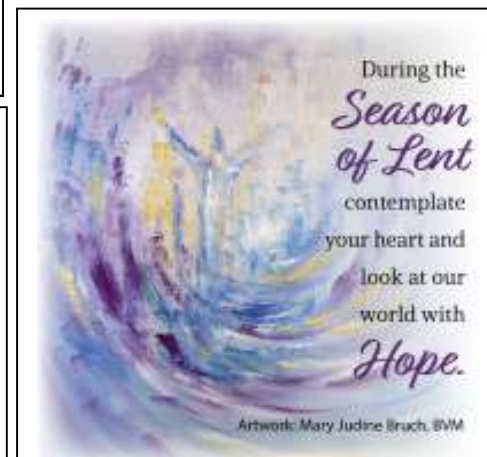
Amen.

How can we find time for God and others in our busy lives?

How can we attract others towards the "fragrance of the Gospel" whilst being faithful to the moral teachings of the Church?

Can we leave open the door of our Church?
What are the "pastoral consequences or implications"?

What are the obvious wounds of those around us,
what are the hidden wounds?
How can we help to heal those wounds?



During the
Season
of Lent
contemplate
your heart and
look at our
world with
Hope.

Artwork: Mary Judine Bruch, BVM