

Our Lenten Journey 3

The Samaritan Woman by the Well.



Paolo Veronese

What is the importance of the book of Exodus (first reading)?

The book of Exodus is the story of Moses leading the people out of slavery in Egypt through the blood sprinkled on their lintels to the promised land. Christ, the new Moses, as we saw last week will start a new exodus from slavery and sin to the promised land by His own blood. However, the story of the journey in the desert teaches us a lot about the spiritual journey. The Jews were meant to make a short journey to the promised land in fifty days (cp Easter to Pentecost) but they would not trust in God and continued therefore to fail in the ten tests He set them (cp Ten plagues of Egypt). They would not leave behind them the gods of Egypt. In the first reading God gave them what was to be a place of rest (Rephidim – Ex 17:1) so that they could accomplish the journey easily but they would not trust Him thinking it impossible that He could provide drink for so many people and cattle. Therefore they rebelled and it became a place of bitterness. (Massah)

What is the relevance for our Lenten journey?

Like the Israelites, we shall face tough tests in Lent because we are fighting an internal battle against our faults. We must learn to trust in God believing that He has the power to heal us and to provide help in our battle with our faults even when it seems hopeless to us and that we are going to die of thirst. We must also leave aside our own gods – whatever they be – if we are not going to perish in the desert like the first generation of the Israelites – why perish? Because this life will not accept mediocrity or half-heartedness or lukewarmness (cp Hebrews). We must throw away the weights that hinder us from moving quickly. “The desert does not allow any compromise: it brutally obliges you to make a choice: between the inhospitable path, the endless advance with the bare minimum of baggage – or death.” (The Hermitage Within)

What will be our food in our Lenten journey?

God fed the people with bread from heaven, Manna (Ex 16:15) but we shall be fed with something far greater: The eternal word who took flesh (Feast of the Annunciation on Monday) will be our food: we have scripture and contemplation where we will receive spiritual refreshment and of course the Eucharist: the Holy Spirit will guide us surely with sweetness and light through the desert of our trial – as the angels ministered to Jesus.

What will be our drink? The importance of the Gospel.

The greatest danger in a desert is dehydration and thirst. It was a test that was given to the Israelites three times. Water is essential. God led the people to Elim where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees (Ex 15:27 – Lc 10) : twelve apostles and seventy disciples. God then gave them water from the rock at Horeb (Numbers 20:8) Moses took his staff and struck the rock. This episode is important because the rock is a type of Christ who gives us the real water of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul himself tells us this: “ they all drank from the supernatural rock that accompanied their travels – and that rock was Christ.” St. Paul also warns us “these events happened as symbols to warn us not to set our desires on evil things as they did.”

Water and the Gospel of St. John.

Water is a vital image in the Gospel of Saint John. Why? It is the first element of life and therefore of humanity and occurs in different forms with different meanings: springs = source of life, element of creation; great rivers = give life to the land; the sea = power and majesty, crossing the sea implies baptism. (cf Jesus of Nazareth, Pope Benedict XVI). In Chapter 3 Jesus tells Nicodemus that “no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born from water and the Spirit.” Chapter 7 sees Jesus’ cry “if anyone is thirsty let him come to me; whoever believes in me let him drink.” Chapter 9 the blind man has to wash; Chapter 13 Jesus washes the apostles’ feet and at the crucifixion (19) water pours from the side of Christ. Some very important themes not least that water is changed into wine (Cana) and wine into blood (Last supper) and that blood is poured out for us.

The Samaritan Woman

She is so like us; we focus on the material plane of things, we think of what we need for our bodily well being and can be in danger of losing sight of the spiritual message. But Christ, as he did with the Samaritan woman, will lift us higher and make us thirst for the only true water that can quench our thirst. All that is required on our part is to drink from the rock and to worship “in spirit and in truth.” But if we ponder the Gospel message that requires that we are ready to listen, ready to be lifted higher and then ready ourselves to go out to the harvest to bring others to the spring of life.

Have we set some time aside this Lent to refresh ourselves in the desert with Jesus?

1. What are our gods? What keeps us weighed down in the desert and stops us moving to the oases? Attachment to certain sins? Attachment to material goods? Pride?
2. Have we meditated on the great gifts that we have been given on our journey? Do we make use of the sacraments of confession and the Eucharist? Are we reading the word of God?
3. Have we considered that like the pillar of cloud and fire we must move when God commands and rest when He commands? Rest is important. Leisure is the basis of true culture. Do we take enough rest so that Jesus can refresh us? (to refresh means to make anew.)

Some interesting Scripture passages to read in this context: Hebrews Chp 3 is essential reading to understand our journey. First however read psalm 95. Also read 1 Cor 10:1-13 which is St. Paul's commentary on the importance of the rock and water.

God bless and may He speed us on our way to Glory,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dominic O'Connor". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Father Dominic O'Connor