

3rd Sunday Lent A: At God's Pace.

This non Jewish woman at the well teaches us all a lesson about God's protocol. So often we set the agenda imploring God's will to comply with ours. When he doesn't we feel let down, sometimes betrayed, or at least ignored by divine providence. What we fail to see is that God does see the big picture. The divine Will knows all the facts and details of every event within the context of eternal time. While we mere humans are locked into the present, ignorant of the future and unaware of most of the details. No wonder there is conflict!

Our First Reading well depicts such conflict. Both the names Massah and Merribah cause one to tremble; for they respectively mean test and arguing. The Israelites in the desert were being tested and started arguing with Moses, after having seen extraordinary signs and miracles that perhaps God was not on their side. In God's time, when he was ready, a miracle was worked and the rock, once struck by the staff of Moses, gave them water to drink. Allegorically the Rock is Christ who would be struck on Calvary and provide 'living water' – grace – for our souls.

The theme of 'living water' features in our Gospel. The Samaritan woman is an outcast in her own community on account of her adulterous lifestyle, which explains why she needs to seek water several kilometres away for she was not welcome at the town well. The encounter begins with indifference. God however initiates the discourse and pursues this lost soul in the form of a request. Incidentally at that time, Jews did not speak to Samaritans and Rabbis would never address a woman in public. So Jesus' request for water – a breach of protocol – surprises her but she remains aloof, as most sinners do before their Saviour, by addressing him by his nationality – a Jew!

Once a dialogue begins, using water as the basis, he inspires her to seek 'living water' for her soul. Drawn now by divine grace she thirsts for divine consolation which requires a turning from something to Someone. A leaving aside that which binds the soul to embrace that which quenches the soul. When attempting to side-step her present status and then being confronted with the enormity of her sinful past, she recoils into politics and social opinion. God deals with facts not fiction, and the truth is terrifying! The Lord lets her ramble on. In his time and at his pace, she is drawn back into his realm until the divine Presence is realised and she professes her belief in him, as the Messiah, the Christ.

The conversion is complete and she is transformed so much so that she leaves her water jar for now she possesses 'living water' and goes to settle her domestic affairs, convinced that she is now healed of her sinful past. The disciples arrive as she leaves and are amazed at this breach of protocol. After all a Rabbi talking to a Samaritan woman!

Daily God is breaching our protocols, changing our agendas, working his grace at his pace to save our souls. All he asks of us is to pray and persevere. Saint Patrick is a great saint for that very reason. Patrick's legacy who died in 461 still lives on. He evangelized the Irish for thirty years and left them with a robust and fervent Church that has endured for many centuries.

There are two historical documents concerning the life of this popular saint. He was not Irish but English. Born in Great Britain he was kidnapped as a teenager and forced to work as a slave in Ireland for some years before he managed to escape and return to England. After entering a Monastery in Auxerre, France, he studied to become a priest under the guidance of the missionary St. Germain.

As time passed, Patrick became a monk but never lost sight of his vision to convert Ireland to Christianity. Around 430 Pope Celestine I, seeking to spread the Gospel in Ireland chose Bishop Palladius as his esteemed missionary. Patrick was overlooked or just ignored. What a mistake some might think. How could one get it so wrong? Who is Palladius after, all? In God's time and at God's pace. After a year, Palladius died and Patrick is then chosen as his successor. All that he had learnt during those years of captivity now would be put to use – for God wastes nothing – we might but he doesn't. The rest is Irish history. The conversion of the local leaders, the casting forth of the druids dominion – exemplified as the cleansing of snakes – the thousands of baptisms, the fasting and prayer.

Let us be mindful during Lent not to complain but be open to God's agenda and his plan for us so that not my will but Thy will be done.