

Meditations: Sunday of the Third Week of Lent (Year A)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the 3rd week of Lent.

- Staying close to God during moments of trial
- Jesus' thirst
- The Samaritan woman's need

PERHAPS with the initial excitement of being freed from slavery now dying down, the people of Israel, tormented by thirst, began to

murmur against Moses: “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to let us, our children, and our livestock die of thirst?” (*Ex 17:3*). Despite having witnessed God’s wonders, as time passed his presence became less evident, and doubts began to assail them: “Is the Lord among us or not?” (*Ex 17:17*). The people sought tangible proof to confirm their path, and needed a stronger faith. The Lord then told Moses to strike a rock, from which “water would flow for the people to drink” (*Ex 17:6*).

In everyone’s life difficult moments arise. We would like our life to unfold without unforeseen events disrupting our plans, but reality is not like that. Like the people of Israel, we can go through situations when we feel as though God had distanced himself from us, when we find ourselves overwhelmed by external obstacles or invaded by inner sadness. But knowing that no

trial is greater than God's strength should console us. No matter how strong our thirst for peace, tranquility, or security, God will never cease to watch over each of his children. "Sometimes, when things turn out the very opposite of what we intended, we cry out spontaneously: 'Lord, it's all going wrong, every single thing I'm doing!' The time has come for us to rectify our approach and say: 'With you, Lord, I will make steady headway, because you are strength itself, *quia tu es, Deus, fortitudo mea.*'"^[1]

Although it may sometimes not be easy to discern the working of providence, especially in the midst of tribulation, God is always acting within us. "Desolation causes an 'unrest in the soul': when one is sad it is as if the soul were shaken. It keeps us alert, it fosters vigilance and humility, and protects us from the winds of fancy. These are

indispensable conditions for progress in life, and hence, also in spiritual life.”^[2] Behind every trial lies something God is trying to tell us, just as thirst helped the Israelites to grow in their trust in God.

LIKE the people of Israel, Jesus too experienced thirst. After setting out for Galilee, he had to pass through Samaria. While the disciples were looking for food, our Lord, “wearied from the journey” (*Jn* 4:6), sat down at a well. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink” (*Jn* 4:7). A conversation then began that changed the woman’s life.

Jesus was tired and thirsty. However, it is interesting to note that at no point in the narrative is it mentioned that He drank water. When his

disciples arrived with the food, He told them: “I have food to eat of which you do not know . . . My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work” (*Jn* 4:32, 34). Facing a person in need, God’s thirst, which is greater than any physical thirst, cannot be quenched. Jesus’ weariness and hunger can only be satisfied by proclaiming his Gospel to those he met and sought out along the way. That is why He had come down to earth. “Jesus’ thirst was not so much for water, but for the encounter with a parched soul. Jesus needed to encounter the Samaritan woman in order to open her heart: he asks for a drink so as to bring to light her own thirst.”^[3] —

Often we may find ourselves in the same situation as Jesus. After a demanding day of work, we are tired and long for a well-deserved rest. But on arriving home, we encounter people who also need us: a spouse or

child who deserves our full attention and care, a sibling who needs our help, a friend who seeks us out to talk... At such times, we may have the legitimate desire to protect our personal space and time. However, the “water” that truly quenches our thirst is loving and serving those around us. Jesus thus gives us the path to true joy, the joy that comes from sharing our life with others.^[4]

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DURING that dialogue at the well, the Samaritan woman recognized Jesus as the Messiah. Therefore, as soon as she realized this, “she left her water jar, went back to the town and said to the people, ‘Come and see a man who told me everything that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?’” (*Jn* 4:28-29). The Gospel tells us that “many Samaritans from that city

believed in him because of the woman's testimony" (*Jn 4:39*).

At no point do we read that Jesus exhorted the Samaritan woman to announce his presence. He gave her no explicit instruction or special mission, as he would other people, beginning with the apostles.

Proclaiming what she had experienced was simply something that sprang from that woman's heart. She felt the need to share with her friends the wonder she had just witnessed, the peace that comes from realizing that God knows her like no one else in this world and, for that very reason, was extending his hand to her: "He told me all that I ever did" (*Jn 4:39*). The panorama that Jesus opened up for her impelled her to go and seek out her acquaintances. "The ideal of love for God and others," wrote the Prelate of Opus Dei, "leads us to cultivate friendship with many people: we do not 'do

apostolate,' we are apostles! This is the path of the 'Church that goes forth,' of which the Pope speaks frequently, reminding us of the importance of tenderness, magnanimity, and personal contact.”^[5] —

Nevertheless, it wasn't the woman who transformed the other Samaritans. All she did was bring Jesus to the people. And they, upon getting to know the teacher from Galilee, asked Him to stay with them. “And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, ‘It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world’” (*Jn* 4:41-42). This is the mission of an apostle: to place people before Jesus while taking a discreet second place. And this is also what our Mother Mary does: “We go to Jesus – and we ‘return’ to him – through Mary.”^[6] —

[1] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 213.

[2] Francis, Audience, 16 November 2022.

[3] Francis, Angelus, 23 March 2014.

[4] Cf. St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 591.

[5] Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Letter, 14 February 2017, no. 9.

[6] Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 495.

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