

3rd Sunday in Lent - A

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Exodus 17:3-7

The Book of Exodus (Greek for "going out") relates the oppression of the Israelites in Egypt; the birth and education of Moses and his flight into the land of Midian; the appearance of God to Moses at Mount Sinai (Horeb); revelation of the sacred name of Yahweh (I AM), and the commissioning of Moses and Aaron to deliver the Israelites from bondage; the return of Moses to Egypt, and his vain appeal to Pharaoh to let Israel to go free; the first 9 plagues (blood, frogs, gnats, flies, on livestock, boils, hail, locusts, and darkness); the institution of the Passover meal and the 10th plague (on the firstborn), and Israel's departure from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, the death of the pursuing Egyptians, the Song of Triumph, the manna, and other incidents of the journey through the wilderness; the sojourn at Mount Sinai and the giving of the Law, including the 10 commandments and the book of the covenant; directions for the building of the tabernacle and the consecration of Aaron and the priests; the falling away of the people from Yahweh and the worshiping of the golden calf; the prayer of Moses for the people and their return to God's favor; the construction of the tabernacle and its furniture.

Unfortunately, the author does not name the Pharaoh or Pharaohs under whom the events in Egypt transpired. 1 Kings 6:1 says that it was 480 years from the Exodus to Solomon's temple. Since Solomon ascended to the throne in 960 B.C., the exodus would have been about 1440 B.C. This would place the events in the 15th century, but archaeological evidence points to a 13th century date. If one takes the 1st Kings 480 years to be a round number indicating twelve generations, a 13th century date is possible; in fact, 1280 is suggested by archaeological evidence (Rameses II was pharaoh from 1292-1225 B.C.). Tradition has Moses as the author.

Today's reading describes events which took place just before the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai. Since they arrived at Mount Sinai three months after they left Egypt, this is very early in the Exodus; but after the manna and the quail. From the wilderness of Sin the Israelites moved on to Rephidim which most scholars today locate in the Wadi Refayid, some 30 miles from Mount Sinai.

³ Here, then, in their thirst for water, the people grumbled against Moses,

This is the second incident involving water. The first (Exodus 15:22-27), involved water that was too bitter (alkaline) to drink. At that, the Israelites grumbled against Moses, the Lord told him to throw a piece of wood into the water, and it became sweet. There, the water was bitter, here there is none at all. They grumble against Moses again but their quarrel is really with God: they do not believe He can be their God in the wilderness and don't trust Him to provide for them.

saying, "Why did you ever make us leave Egypt? Was it just to have us die here of thirst with our children and our livestock?" ⁴ So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? A little more and they will stone me!" ⁵ The LORD answered Moses, "Go over there in front of the people, along with some of the elders of Israel, holding in your hand, as you go,

the staff with which you struck the river.

The staff is the same one that turned into a serpent, brought forth the plagues of frogs and gnats, turned the Nile into blood, and parted the Red Sea.

⁶ I will be standing there in front of you on the rock in Horeb.

“Horeb” is a general name for the mountain range that runs through the region. Sinai is one of its peaks. Generally, the name is used interchangeably with Sinai.

Strike the rock, and the water will flow from it for the people to drink." This Moses did, in the presence of the elders of Israel.

Notice that there is no divine rebuke, but only the command to take some of the elders and go to the rock and strike it. The elders represent the people and are witnesses.

⁷ The place was called Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled there and tested the LORD,

"Massah" means "the (place of the) testing" and "Meribah" means "the (place of the) quarreling" in Hebrew.

saying, "Is the LORD in our midst or not?"

God has provided manna and water in the desert, He has withstood their test and has shown His authority over the wilderness.

From this incident, later rabbis built an oral tradition that this rock as a source of water followed the Israelites through the desert. St. Paul refers to this oral tradition in 1 Corinthians 10:4. Yet, there are people today who state that oral tradition has no authority.

2nd Reading - Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

The letter to the Romans was written by Paul during his third missionary journey (A.D. 55-56). It was probably written from Corinth. Paul's background was that of a Hebrew pharisee, and thus schooled in the concept of family covenant rather than in the Roman court as so many today try to assert. We must always be careful to interpret Scripture through the eyes and understanding of the sacred writer.

^{5:1} Therefore, since we have been justified by faith,

The earlier part of this book shows that faith is not just believing, but living out that belief because of certainty that God is true to His covenant. His covenant with Abraham (to provide worldwide blessing) is not yet finished. In fact, the first and last uses by Saint Paul of the word “faith” in this book of Romans (1:5 and 16:26) it is not “faith alone”, but “obedience of faith” to which he refers,

thus setting the context for the use of the word “faith” throughout the entire epistle. The only use of the term “faith alone” in the entire Bible is in James 2:24 where it says “*See how a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.*”

“Let no one say to himself: ‘If [justification] is from faith, how is it freely given: If faith merits it, why is it not rather paid than given?’ Let the faithful man not say such a thing; for, if he says: ‘I have faith, therefore I merit justification,’ he will be answered: ‘What have you that you did not receive?’ If, therefore, faith entreats and receives justification, according as God has apportioned to each in the measure of his faith, nothing of human merit precedes the grace of God, but grace itself merits increase, and the increase merits perfection, with the will accompanying but not leading, following along but not going in advance.” (Saint Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 417), *Letter to Paulinus of Nola*, 186,3,7]

we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Because of Jesus' all-perfect sacrifice, heaven is now opened and we are no longer slaves or servants, but children of God. See also Romans 14:19.

² through whom we have gained access (by faith) to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God. ⁵ And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us.

As children of God, we have an inheritance the kingdom of God.

⁶ For Christ, while we were still helpless, yet died at the appointed time for the ungodly. ⁷ Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person, though perhaps for a good person one might even find courage to die.

Before the sacrifice of Christ, no one was justified and could do nothing to enable them to appear morally right before God.

⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

God so loves us that He allowed His Son to die so that heaven might be opened and we could enter. There is no quid pro quo here, this is not repayment, but a gift to us who are so undeserving.

“If Christ gave Himself up to death at the right time for those who were unbelievers and enemies of God ... how much more will He protect us with His help if we believe in Him! He died for us in order to obtain life and glory for us. So if He died for His enemies, just think what He will do for His friends!” [The Ambrosiaster (A.D. 366-384), *Commentaries on Thirteen Pauline Epistles*]

Gospel - John 4:5-42

This event happened very early in Jesus' public ministry: immediately after His baptism, the wedding feast at Cana, and His encounter with Nicodemus, all of which have baptismal significance.

⁵ So he came to a town of Samaria

During the Assyrian occupation most of the inhabitants of Israel had been carried off into exile; some remained behind and intermingled with the people whom Sargon II (king of Assyria) had imported from Babylon, Cutah, Affa, Hamath, and Sepharuaim; thus forming a new people. From that time on, these people were called Samaritans (2 Kings 17:24). Friendly relations existed between the Samaritans and the kingdom of Judah until the Babylonian exile. When the Samaritans desired to assist the repatriated Jews in rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem, their offer was refused (Ezra 4:2-3). The Samaritans therefore built a temple of their own on Mount Gerizim. The Jews regarded them as racially impure and compromisers in religion. The usual route from Judea to Galilee lay through Samaria and took about three days.

called Sychar, near the plot of land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there.

"Sychar" Means "liar" or "drunkard". Archaeologists have identified it with 'Askar, a small town on the southern base of Mount Ebal., about a mile north of Jacob's well. Saint Jerome identifies it as Shechem, as noted in Syriac manuscripts. Genesis 33:19 tells of Jacob's purchase of the land and Joshua 24:32 tells us that Joseph was buried there.

Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down there at the well. It was about noon. ⁷ A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ His disciples had gone into the town to buy food. ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" (For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.)

Not only was it unheard of for a rabbi to speak familiarly with a woman in public, it was also unheard of for a Jew to request a drink from a Samaritan. Jews considered Samaritans, and therefore their utensils for eating and drinking, unclean.

¹⁰ Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,'

Jesus himself, whom the woman does not yet recognize, is the gift. She sees only a Jew who is a very bold and thirsty traveler.

you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ (The woman) said to him, "Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep; where then can you get this living water?"

As Nicodemus did (John 3:4), the woman takes Jesus literally. She thinks he is talking about flowing water rather than water from a well or cistern. Just as He did with Nicodemus, Jesus uses this misunderstanding as an opportunity for further teaching.

¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this cistern and drank from it himself with his children and his flocks?"

Since Jesus can't mean to get water from this well, where will He get it? Even Jacob had no better source than this well. The Samaritans also claimed descent from the patriarchs, through the Joseph tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh and thus refer to Jacob as their father.

¹³ Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Jesus begins to explain the meaning of His words (as He does every time He is misunderstood). Sirach 24:20 (a writing with which the Samaritan woman would be unfamiliar) says that the drinker of wisdom will thirst again. The water which Christ will give will satisfy thirst forever. The Christian reader is reminded of baptism, the water of Christ that confers the gift of eternal life.

¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

The woman still misunderstands.

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go call your husband and come back."

The Hebrew word for husband is *baal* which also means "lord".

¹⁷ The woman answered and said to him, "I do not have a husband." Jesus answered her, "You are right in saying, 'I do not have a husband.' ¹⁸ For you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true."

In saying "the man you are with now", Jesus is referring to Himself. Jacob met his wife at a well but Jesus tells her that He is not destined to be her husband. There is, however, a much deeper meaning: Hosea 2 tells of when the Messiah comes he will go to Israel (Samaria) and betroth to Israel and take away the Baals. According to Dr. Scott Hahn, the prophets were sent to condemn Samaria "you will be given over to the pagan nations surrounding you and they will bring their Baals (gods)." The prophets listed five different Baals (2 Kings 17) and she has had five husbands (baals).

¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I can see that you are a prophet."

A curious statement, coming from a Samaritan. The Samaritans held only the first five books of the Bible to be sacred because they rejected the prophets (who did not speak kindly of them). The only prophet they accepted was the one who was to come as promised in Deuteronomy 18:15-19. What she is really saying is that Jesus is The Prophet.

²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain; but you people say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem."

This conversation takes place at the foot of Mount Gerizim (Mount Ebal in Jewish terminology), the Samaritan place of worship; here the patriarchs had sacrificed (Genesis 12:7; 33:20) and here according to the Samaritan version of Deuteronomy 27:4, the Israelites had first set up an altar in

Palestine.

²¹ Jesus said to her, "Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You people worship what you do not understand; we worship what we understand, because salvation is from the Jews.

Jesus must be agreeing that in Judaism, not the Samaritan version of it, God's revelation has been safeguarded.

²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him.

The first mention of His "hour" in John's gospel is associated with wine at the marriage feast. Here, it is associated with worship. The Spirit is given by God that reveals truth and enables one to worship God appropriately (John 14:16-17). The Spirit is received at baptism.

²⁴ God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth."

The new covenant which Jesus will institute is Spirit and truth.

²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah is coming, the one called the Anointed; when he comes, he will tell us everything."

The woman again states her recognition that Jesus is the prophet the Samaritans had expected; she uses Jewish terminology, the Samaritans expected a prophet like Moses.

²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking with you."

Jesus confirms her knowledge by saying "I am" (Yahweh).

²⁷ At that moment his disciples returned, and were amazed that he was talking with a woman, but still no one said, "What are you looking for?" or "Why are you talking with her?" ²⁸ The woman left her water jar and went into the town and said to the people, ²⁹ "Come see a man who told me everything I have done. Could he possibly be the Messiah?"

The woman leaves to spread the word without the usual warning of "tell no one." She is the first evangelist.

³⁰ They went out of the town and came to him. ³¹ Meanwhile, the disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat." ³² But he said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." ³³ So the disciples said to one another, "Could someone have brought him something to eat?"

The woman fully realizes who Jesus is, but the disciples are slow to understand. They still take everything in its superficial sense.

³⁴ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work.

In these words Jesus sums up His entire career.

³⁵ Do you not say, 'In four months the harvest will be here'?

This is apparently some sort of Palestinian proverb. It takes four months from planting to harvest.

I tell you, look up and see the fields ripe for the harvest.

The harvest of which Jesus speaks is of God's planting and is ready now (see Matthew 9:37-38). The woman who goes even now to witness to the people of her village, who will soon come to see for themselves.

³⁶ The reaper is already receiving his payment and gathering crops for eternal life, so that the sower and reaper can rejoice together.

In this harvest there is no interval at all from sowing to reaping, the sower and the reaper rejoice at the same time when their jobs are finished.

³⁷ For here the saying is verified that 'One sows and another reaps.'

Job 31:8; Ecclesiastes 2:21.

³⁸ I sent you to reap what you have not worked for; others have done the work, and you are sharing the fruits of their work." ³⁹ Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him because of the word of the woman who testified, "He told me everything I have done."

The Samaritans follow the model of all who have true faith; almost the same words are used to describe the disciples in John 17:20. First having believed because of the woman's testimony, they eventually come to believe because of His own word.

⁴⁰ When the Samaritans came to him, they invited him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ Many more began to believe in him because of his word, ⁴² and they said to the woman, "We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world."

Not only have they come to believe, they also recognize in Him something more than the Messiah to which the woman had witnessed. Jesus, by transcending national lines in dealing with them, has laid a basis for a universal affirmation of God's salvation.