

Homily 3rd Sunday in Lent 2026

'The story of The Samaritan Woman at the well of Jacob, is the meeting place between Old Covenant (Jacob/Israel) and New Covenant (Jesus)'

Water, usually mixed with coolant/antifreeze, is essential in a car radiator because it removes excess heat from the engine and prevents damage. Back in 1973 my youngest sister, Bridie Maria RIP who was sixteen at the time, came to visit me in Italy whilst I was studying at major seminary. We decided to visit Milan but the only transport available was an old classic Fiat. On the way back the car broke down on the motorway. I realised immediately that the car had overheated so I asked Bridie if she would go across the fields to an isolated farmhouse and ask for 'acqua per la macchina' (water for the car). Off she went and returned about 30 mins later carrying the biggest watering can you could imagine. She stood innocently at the back of the car as I poured the precious liquid into the radiator. 'John', she immediately enquired, 'should that water be pouring out of the exhaust pipe?'

Water is also essential for life and so it was for The Chosen People as they wandered in the desert. They grumbled when it appeared that God had broken The Sinai Covenant as they were left hungry and thirsty. Their hypocrisy was, it was they who had abandoned Yahweh making a Golden Calf and cursing his name whilst going over to graven images. It was they who been unfaithful and broke the first 3 commandments of The Sinai Covenant. Despite their grumbling God still did eventually, provide them with 'water from the rock in the desert.'

The Gospel today can only be understood in the light of some historical details. Samaritans were hated by The Jews, considered 'illegitimate sons/daughters of Israel.' When Samaria in 722 BC was invaded by the Assyrians many in Samaria gave up their faith in Yahweh and intermarried with the occupying Assyrians. It was anathema for a Jew to be in the presence of a Samaritan far less dialogue with a Samaritan WOMAN. Jacob's Well was the place of Jesus' encounter with The Samaritan woman near the town of Sychar. Jesus asks her for a drink. He speaks about "living water," meaning spiritual life and salvation, "Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst." Their conversation continues and includes teachings on spiritual renewal, true and authentic worship, and inclusion beyond cultural divisions.

The woman like The Chosen People demonstrates a hint of hypocrisy, 'I have no husband!' Jesus responds, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband.' A debate on where true worship takes place is initiated by the woman but Jesus dismisses established shrines and temples and reminds her, 'The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth', more important than place. It is soon clear to the woman that Jesus himself is claiming to be the New Temple, the new altar and the new lamb of sacrifice, 'Destroy this temple and in I will rebuild it in 3 days.'

Jesus reveals himself as The Messiah from whom will flow 'living water', eternal spiritual life, through his death on the Cross when 'blood and water flow from his side.' It's on that Cross that the New Covenant is perfected and fulfilled in Christ's blood superseding The Old Covenants symbolised by water. This reality is clear from the miracle at Marriage Feast of Cana when symbolically Jesus turns water, The Old Covenant, into the wine of The New Covenant in his blood as he begins his public ministry.

Water is essential to life, whether it be in a car radiator or for human survival. However, there is something infinitely more important, The Blood of The Lamb poured out for us to ensure freedom from sin and victory over death and life eternal. How stunningly beautiful is that?