

3rd Sunday of Lent (Scrutiny A09)

From sinner to disciple

We have just heard a long gospel with many messages. We could spend a long time unravelling each part. However, today, in just a few minutes, we have the first of three scrutinies for one who will be baptised at Easter. These are rites for self-searching and repentance. They are meant to uncover then heal all that is weak, and sinful in the heart of the candidate. That healing can then bring out and strengthen all that is good and strong in their life. But the scrutiny isn't just about the candidate, it is as much about us as it is about them.

So why this Year A gospel of the Woman at the Well for this first scrutiny? The answer is given to us in the Preface for this Mass. A Preface that Fr. Timothy will pray for us and with us after the Offertory. It says "When he asked the woman of Samaria for water to drink Christ had already prepared for her the gift of faith. In his thirst to receive her faith he awakened in her heart the fire of (the Father's) love".

In other words, when he asked the woman, Jesus was setting her up to receive the gift of faith. He had wrapped the present, all she had to do was receive it. It then goes on to say that 'in his thirst to receive her faith'; this is Jesus speaking of his desire for all of us to admit and express our faith. Then it says 'he awakened in her heart the fire of (the Father's) love'. That is what Jesus wants to do for us, stir us into a realisation that we are loved by God.

In two sentences we are being told by the Church in that Preface to our Eucharistic Prayer today, that we as a community should be doing three things for our candidate.

First we should be preparing for her the gift of faith that Jesus wants to give to her. We are all called to pass on our faith. The question we might ask ourselves is "Is our faith

in a good enough condition to be handed on?” Is it shining like a priceless pearl or is it somewhat rusty and in need of some WD 40 or even a complete overhaul?

Secondly, we should be thirsting as a community to receive our candidate’s faith with great joy because that is what Jesus did in this and many other similar situations.

And, thirdly, we should be awakening in our candidate’s heart the fire of God’s love for them and for every one of us.

Jesus did all of that for the woman at the well and as a result lead her to faith and hope. We are now expected to do exactly the same as we lead our candidate through these scrutinies of healing into their baptism at our Easter Vigil.

Bishop Peter in his address to the Diocese, that we are now hearing much about, talks about ways of being church and he says that it all begins with our baptism into the Body of Christ. He goes on to make it absolutely clear that we all have a part to play in the mission that God has entrusted to his Church in the world. And, sadly, that is something that only some of us believe. However, our candidate, I feel sure, wants to join a Church in which we all, every single one of us, believe that God loves us and that we really do have a part to play in spreading that message of love.

So let’s remember that baptism is a beginning in which we, or our godparents, say to God “I believe in you” and God responds “You are my beloved in whom I am well pleased”. It’s just like that conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well; it turned her from being a sinner into a disciple and that is precisely what we are all called to be – disciples of Jesus. Let’s join with our candidate and with Bishop Peter in trying to follow the Lord’s call.