

Reflection for the Third Sunday of Lent. John 4: 5-42 *Andrew Macwilliam*

There are some people who use humour as a sort of defence mechanism, a way to avoid having to give too much of themselves away. We may have met people whose conversation is full of good cheer and banter, but we never meet the real person beneath it all. The Samaritan woman that Jesus meets at the well is just such a one. Jesus is resting by the well as his friends go off in search of some lunch. The Jews and the Samaritans are bitter enemies, they both think that the others are not following God in a proper manner. Their differences run deep, as does their mutual distrust. The problem is that to make your way down to the south of the country means either a long detour or walking through hostile Samaria. It would seem that Jesus and friends are taking the shorter route through Samaria. The Samaritan woman comes to draw water from the well. Normally the women of the village would have gone to draw water together in the early morning, so already there is a query about this woman in her solo trip to the well. She is avoiding contact with others. Convention was that Jewish men did not speak with women on their own, even less a Samaritan woman, but Jesus asks her for a drink of water. For her part the woman expresses surprise that Jesus should ask her, a Samaritan, for water. It is to this woman that Jesus is ready to confess who He is and that the water could be a gift of God. Faced with this, the woman hides in banter, but Jesus continues the theological argument as her own personal circumstances come into question. So, she counters with, 'I know that the Messiah is coming'. Jesus then says, "I am He!" The woman runs in panic back to her village saying, 'He can't possibly be the Messiah – or can He be?' It is at this moment, in this strange place, that Jesus is ready to own the Messiahship, to say, "I am He", something He seems reluctant to do elsewhere. John does not tell us what happens to the Samaritan woman; many Samaritans became believers at this time but what of her? Did she come to faith or just make it a part of a funny story to tell others of the man she met at the well?

In another situation Clopas and his friend come across Jesus on the road to Emmaus but do not recognise Him until He breaks breads with them. How then would we react if we were faced with the same situation, if we were to meet with Jesus? Would we react with disbelief? Do we in fact meet with Jesus in some form or another along our way and how do we respond? How ready are we and how open could we be? We like to think that we would respond positively and quickly without hesitation.

The Father has put us into this world not to walk through it with lowered eyes but to search for him through things, events, people. Everything must reveal God to us.

Michel Quoist. Prayers of Life.