

Homily Lent 3 Sunday 7th March, 2010.

Mass Readings: (Year A) Exodus 17:3-7; Romans 5:1-2,5-8; John 4:50-42.

I remember once being in the friary church late at night and I heard a shuffling outside. Who can that be? On opening the door I found a woman standing there and she asked for confession. It turned out that she hadn't been to a church for a long time. On hearing a knock on the door or the phone late at night it can be so easy to resent this nuisance at the end of a busy day. I might not have heard the knock. She might have given up. But God is there in what is so vulnerable and easily overlooked; He always is. There are occasions, I'm sure you've had them too, when you're caught up in something 'important' and the phone rings or the door bell goes, or there is a shuffle outside late in the evening and you think "Who on earth can that be?!" There are no real inconveniences for us, only God and His surprises.

The woman comes to the well at noon. It's hot, there won't be other women gathering there at that time to talk and gossip and cold-shoulder her. Only mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun! And the lonely, the hungry, the desperate, those whom we have been considering are truly hungry, and so, like Jesus, enter the desert. There will be nobody there; it's why she goes then. She's thirsty, so she needs to go, but not we suspect just for water. She's lonely. I'd say she's a bit of a wild character, someone who's looked life full in the face, and wears the scars. Her five husbands plus her current partner tell us that she has a thirst that hasn't yet been touched. No one has really met her need yet. She goes to the well and someone is sitting there looking as if He's waiting for someone else, it certainly can't be her. No one just hangs around out in the midday sun; He must be expecting to meet a friend, but not her. He's not going to want to talk to a woman in public; she'll be left in peace. There's nothing He'll want from her, no one has ever been truly interested in her.

Here it is then, a casual encounter that so easily could not have occurred. One night I was in the church and there's a shuffling outside. Wondering who on earth it could be I open the door and a woman is there. She wants to come in, she's searching for a way in, not just to the building, but a way forward that is also a way back. She's thirsty and looking for the well. She's a bit startled when I open the door and surprised to find me there – as if I was somehow listening for her. She wants to return to the Church after an absence of many years. She's come needing to see someone, wanting to be met, hoping to be met, yet surprised when she is met. She's thirsty. Jacob's Well was a meeting point within history yet it's now a meeting point within all time. This is true of all the gospel encounters; within history, yet within every moment. That image of Jesus at the well is a unique and special glimpse into how God is. He waits for each of us, for each single individual as if I was the only person in the world. Take that consoling truth with you into your prayer this week. "*When his son was still a long way off the Father saw him.*" He's here now, for you.

We are all hungry and searching by nature, we just have to give to our searching its true destination and final purpose, God. We referred last week to that hunger that carries us into the desert, and that the desert isn't so much a special place other than where we already are in fact. The space of this moment carries a special invitation to engage with who and where we

actually are already, and to explore the meaning of our hungers and thirsts in the here and now; hence the crucial importance of the here and now. The Samaritan woman is driven by thirst into the desert of the stifling heat of the midday hour to a lonely well, expecting to have only herself for company, because who in their right mind is going to be there? There will be nothing and no one there. I want briefly to focus on the deep well in the apparently empty and isolated desert of the present moment.

Satan who loiters in the desert, in this desert of the moment, will always tell me that there is nothing here, no one here, that I'd be much better off somewhere else, where I'll be truly understood and valued. It's a lie. He tries to break my commitments. He'll try to persuade me that my marriage has become a waste of space, or my ministry has, or my work place has, or indeed that my life has, where I am now. So many times we can say there's nothing for me here - this is boring, this is stifling, this is killing me. But it is only here that God can meet me - wherever that is. There have been those noble and vigilant souls who most wonderfully found Him even in Belsen and Auschwitz. One of the most fundamental lessons of the spiritual life, and we have to come back to it again and again precisely because it is so basic, is that God is not somewhere else. He is not up there or out there, or waiting to engage with me when I become a saint. He is here already, in the depth of what we refer to as 'Now.' That's where He waits for me. I am not to look for myself somewhere else either. That He is here, waiting for me, sitting by me, thirsting for my love and my awakening is inescapably true. If He wasn't here I would instantly cease to exist. Everything in and around us is only here because at each moment, fresh each moment, God sustains us.

So, in all those random moments, idle moments, boring moments, waiting hanging around and nothing is happening moments, painful aching hurting nightmare moments, I wish this would soon be over so I can get on with the rest of my life moments, God is. I can only meet Him here. There is no such thing as the rest of my life - there is only now, here. I don't have the rest of my life. I don't have tomorrow. "*Don't be anxious about tomorrow,*" Jesus tells us. (*Matthew 6:34*) Why? Because it doesn't exist, except in my anticipation; nor does yesterday except in my remembrance. How do I prepare for tomorrow, for my future? Not by being there, but by being here. There is only now. I only have now, here. A basic fact is that the present moment is all there is to life, so I'd better get into it - totally. Literally each one of us only has what we stand up in, and less even, for even that we can't take with us. The challenging purpose of the Lenten desert is to deepen our awareness of this truth and to invite us more completely into it.

God is nowhere else but here. He asks the woman at the well for a drink. He requests that we don't look for Him outside of ourselves or our situation but from within it, whatever that is. There is only His vulnerable loving waiting presence at the deep well of the moment - and His thirst. "*I thirst*". There is also of course His loving presence hidden in the woman herself who comes to the well. "*No one can come to me unless the Father draws him.*" (*John 6:44*) She is in fact herself a deep well also. The Father wishes to draw from this deep well the Life, the Living Water, of His Son. The Son comes to the well, waits at the well, is Himself the true well. He comes to the door; He knocks and waits at the door. He is Himself the true door. He is our Way our Truth and our Life. Jesus asks for water then explains He is the Living Water. He is what she is looking for. The Father always seeks to draw out from us, from the well that

is our life, the Life of His Son Jesus, the One who alone knows us. He seeks to draw from us this Living Water for our sake and for the sake of others.

Let that be our spiritual task for this third week of Lent – to enter fully into each moment. Let our prayer be to let the Father draw from us the life of His Son, wherever I am, however I am. The point here is not only that the moment itself is deep, but that we are, more than we know, and it is that, our depth and potential that Jesus wants to introduce us to. “*You have no bucket Sir and the well is deep.*” We might think this of ourselves. “This is all just too much, I can’t handle this” - whatever. “I haven’t the wherewithal.” Whatever we are doing and wherever we are is the bucket, the moment itself is the bucket, the wherewithal – our life is the well’s depth. In this moment I have everything I need actually, because in this moment I have Him. “*Drink from this well for me,*” Jesus says. “*I am here.*” Whatever we are doing and wherever we are He is there, in His Father’s house, (*Luke 2:49*) which is your life, your heart and your soul, which He refers to as His home. (*John 14:23*) There is absolutely nowhere else He would rather be than with you and I here, now.