



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

3rd Sunday of Lent-Year A-March 15th 2020

Readings: Exodus 17: 3-7, Psalm 94, Romans 5: 1-2 5-8,

John 4: 5-42

Whew !

Apart from the Passion narrative that is about the longest Gospel of the year. So we might ask why, in a necessarily limited account of the Life of Christ, St. John dedicates a whole chapter to this curious event. It would be impossible, within the constraints of a Mass sermon to explore it fully but I would like to give you a few indicators today.

We encounter Jesus on the homeward road. Things are hotting up in Judaea. He is getting a dangerous reputation for being ‘bigger than John the Baptist’ and, with the inevitable political and religious pressure building, He moves out of the limelight for a while.

In order to go home to the Galilee, Jesus and His disciples must pass through Samaria. – A little potted history.....

The Samaritans regarded themselves as the true Israelites. They claim that, after the Jews returned from the exile in Babylon in the 6th Century BC, they changed the place of worship from the true site – Mount Gerizim – to Jerusalem. The Samaritans claim to be the original heirs of the sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, to whom these lands were given.

The Jews regarded the Samaritans as heretics and racially impure, mixed with foreign tribes and conquerors. There was a mutual hatred and suspicion.

So Jesus stops off at Sychar, very near Mt Gerizim. The name of the town means simply, 'The End'. Not insignificant in John.

He rests by Jacob's Well. Jacob, we know, is the very Patriarch from whom the whole of the twelve tribes of Israel flow. Indeed his name becomes Israel. This all takes place in the territory allotted to Jacob's son, Joseph.

But remember Joseph is not there to claim his inheritance. He has been captured by his jealous brothers, who wanted to kill him, and sold into slavery in Egypt. Later on, as we know, through many trials and torments and betrayals, that same Joseph, by God's grace, rises to the right hand man of the Pharaoh and becomes, in the long years of disastrous famine, both the saviour of Egypt and the saviour of Israel and the twelve tribes – his brothers. Joseph is the archetype of the Saviour in the Old Testament. His Egyptian name means the 'Bread of Life' – Ring any bells?

Jesus sits by the well while His disciples go into town to buy lunch. It is High Noon at this place called 'The End' – the very hour at which, in the Crucifixion, darkness would cover the land.

He rests within sight of that other place of worship (Gerizim), in a territory which Joseph, the saviour of Israel, was given but was never able to claim. We are immediately reminded of the betrayal by Joseph's brothers and how their evil was transformed into their salvation by the suffering of Joseph and the overwhelmingly moving account of his forgiveness of their sin against him. We do not need to be profound theologians to see the obvious here. Jesus is at the epicentre of the original division in God's people. He is here to heal it. He is here to

reclaim the lost lands of Joseph, the Saviour. He is here to prefigure what will happen to Him in Jerusalem.

Jesus then crosses two more boundaries. He speaks to a Samaritan, the enemy. He speaks to an unaccompanied woman. You don't do that in His culture.

We watch as two more divisions are healed. The outcast Samaritans are also part of the redeeming work of the new and final Saviour of Israel – Jesus.

There is a reconciliation between Man and Woman. The conflicted relationship after the Fall is to be put right in the relationships that will one day characterise the Church of God.

The tribes are restored. The nation is healed. The relationship of Man is reconfigured to the intention of Creation.

There is much more. But three final headlines:

Jesus asks the woman to call her husband. She tells true when she says she has no husband. But she doesn't fool Jesus. You've had five but the bloke you are currently shackled up with isn't your husband. This is some broad! But what we need to notice is that Jesus knows everything about her. It reminds us that God knows everything about us – still loves us and still works for our salvation. When we make our confession, God is not surprised by the detail – we may be because it is the first time we have owned up to it in ourselves.

Second.... The woman tries to change the subject. Off the personal and into the 'I go to this church. You go to that.' Classic avoidance of evangelism tactic. Let's talk about denominations not about Me and Jesus. Jesus is having none of that but keeps the spotlight remorselessly but compassionately on the truth.

Finally she speaks of the promised saviour. And Jesus replies, 'I AM HE'.

It is here that Jesus utters the Divine Name that was revealed to Moses at the Bush of Fire. The Name of God is co-terminous with Jesus. Here, at the END, where tribes are reconciled, nations reunited, and mankind healed and the promise to all the nations revealed (true worshippers will worship beyond these realms in spirit and in truth) Jesus proclaims His Divinity.

We have not even touched on the other great themes of Water, Moses, The Evangelised Evangeliser etc. but I hope you can see why, even with this mini-lightning tour, John gave over a whole chapter to this event in a distant stop off town in alien territory on a hot day with an unlikely spreader of the Good News.

'Come and meet the guy who knows my whole life.' That must be some guy.

He certainly is.