

## The Third Sunday of Lent

By: Fr. Greg Ames

It was the picture on the front page that drew me to the article. An elderly Japanese woman, sitting in what looks like a washing machine. Reading the article revealed it was 89 year old Toshiko Shibahara, sitting in a human washing machine. In a culture that not only reverences elders, but is fascinated with technology, the Japanese have come upon a way of bathing nursing machine enables the staff to feel less burdened. Not everyone thinks this is a great innovation: *Some people in the industry say Japanese people are not able to accept a robot as a nurse, that they attach importance to the humanity aspect. So we are stuck in the middle between efficiency and nursing with a human touch.*

We like efficiency and the conveniences of technology. But we long for the human touch. Think that the next time the automated voice on the phone draws you into the black hole of press one now followed by the pound sign. We, with all our desire for speed, desire a human voice, the human touch.

On the final three Sundays of Lent, we hear Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman, a blind man, and the grieving sisters of Lazarus. Each is trapped in their sin, their suffering, their sadness. Jesus comes to each with little interest in efficiency. His voice and his touch that tells him there is no sin, or suffering or sadness that is so great, God would not be there. Written centuries ago, in a different culture, these stories are very human; they are our stories. Each story proclaims Jesus is coming to you: not in some supernatural apparition or cyberspace technology. He comes to you in your human life. We start with a story of a woman sitting at a well. Three very human words tell her story:

**ALONE** The Samaritan woman sits alone at the well. Because of choices others avoided her. If they were talking about her behind her back, at least she figured, I don't have to see them. The Hebrew people, even though they numbered hundreds, felt very alone in the desert. Have you ever felt alone; like nobody really understood, or were interested, or cared? In

those alone moments, we can feel very sorry for ourselves, and almost see being alone as unfair or punishment. Or can we begin to see it as the Samaritan woman came to see it; as the Hebrew people saw it: aloneness as a human moment, sometimes a necessary one, to reevaluate my choices, to reflect on my life, to begin again with Christ.

**ACCEPT** Jesus sits with the Samaritan woman: that is big. And you can barely stifle a yawn. She was a woman: big problem, a man like Jesus would not sit alone with a woman. She was a Samaritan: big problem as Jews and Samaritans were not friends. In sitting at the well, Jesus says there is no problem. God does not accept these limits that we place on life. Jesus accepted the idea that people can be different, and the world can change, but not when we limit what we think God can do, or limit what we are willing to do. This is where indifference and prejudice find a home. When we get stuck in life, Jesus sits with us and says you have a choice: you can complain as the Hebrews did at the way things were. Or you can accept, with the help of Jesus, a new way, a different vision of yourself; a new choice that will bring life.

**ALOUD** The human touch of Jesus helps the Samaritan woman see her life in a new way; and then she tells anyone who will listen. But this is more than giving speeches. The Samaritan woman begins live out loud. From that time on, we have to believe, her choices and actions told people she believed that Christ had accepted her, so she now accepted the responsibility to be with others in their aloneness in their struggles. And that is the challenge that faces you: do you live your Christian faith aloud; can it be heard in how you live? You could spend the rest of Lent reflecting on that. In the end, you do not have to reinvent the wheel, or invent some new device. Maybe it is simply listening to that ancient question people still ask today. Maybe it is realizing that your life contains the answer when people wonder, is the Lord in our midst or not?

### READINGS OF THE WEEK

Exodus 17:3-7

Romans 5:1-8

John 4:5-42

March 23, 2014

# 靈 修 生 活

## 永 不 再 喝 的 「活 水」

吉 朝 芳 神 父

今天的第一篇讀經，告訴我們當時的以色列選民，由於在曠野找不到水，而埋怨天主，試探天主，說天主領他們出離埃及，讓他們受苦。雖然他們是如此地埋怨，但天主還是寬恕他們，教梅瑟擊打磐石把水賜給他們。而在福音裡則講述耶穌開始傳道時，經過撒瑪黎雅一個城鎮，並和在那裡汲水的一個婦人說了一些話；這些話為我們含有很大的啓示作用。原來撒瑪黎雅遠在耶穌前七百二十多年前，曾被一強大民族所征服，把他們俘虜，只留下些軟弱可憐的人。這些人後來和猶太人通婚。但由於撒瑪黎雅也雜居其他民族，信奉混合的宗教，為猶太人所不喜，故彼此不相往來。耶穌則籍着這段經文，打從破了這個傳統---即民族的隔模。

經上記述耶穌來到撒瑪黎雅一個城，在那裡休息，並打發門徒去張羅這食物。其後來了個打水的婦人，耶穌便向她要水喝。這婦人可能從耶穌的服裝上或言語上，認出祂是猶太人，覺得一個猶太人竟然向不相往來的撒瑪黎雅人要水喝，甚感驚奇。首先，耶穌當然不單單只是為了口渴的緣故，而是祂明白這汲水婦人的身世，知道她的淫亂行為，籍交談希望她悔改，重新認識天主，認識天主賜給人「活水」的救恩。其次，從耶穌和婦人的對答，我們可以默想到這婦人實際上是「教會」的預像。我們都知道，耶穌的教會不是發自猶太人，而是像撒瑪黎雅這樣的外邦人。

我們由於亞當原祖犯罪的關係，生來就是和天主敵對的人；像這個汲水婦人一樣，不認識天主，是罪人的象徵。耶穌一步步的開導她，讓她了解身為罪人的緣由，並說，如果妳知道天主的恩賜，知道我是誰，反倒會向我要水喝呢。耶穌啟示她，指明甚麼是她需要的，「凡喝這水的，還要再渴；但誰若喝了我賜與他的水，將永遠不渴」。耶穌繼而揭露她的身世，指出她所作的一切，讓她明認自己是先知，是使人重新認識天主的默西亞。最後耶穌講論「以心神以真理朝拜父」的道理，告知她活水的根源是來自天主，是天主所賜；人籍着天主所賜聖神的恩寵，可以獲得救恩，成為天主的兒女。我們未受洗以前，跟這個犯罪的婦人沒有分別，是與天主敵對的人；但籍着受洗和聖神的恩寵，教會讓我們重新成為天主的兒女、天國的繼承人。

這個撒瑪黎雅人認識了耶穌之後，回去宣揚耶穌就是人們所盼望的默西亞，因而間接的引導了許多人認識了天主。我們也應該效法這個撒瑪黎雅婦人，不要獨善其身，自己蒙受救恩便算了；而應向更多未認識天主的人，講天主「活水」的救恩。就像耶穌奉行天父的旨意，把救恩講給了撒瑪黎雅人一樣。救恩是天主早就給我們準備了的，只要我們信靠祂、求祂，必賞給我們。撒瑪黎雅人要求耶穌在那裡多住幾天，我們卻要求耶穌永遠、常常，住在我們心裡。

今天，我們生活在一個交通非常方便的國度，有各種路牌指標，讓我們辨識方向。耶穌要我們通過現世生活，走向天國之路。其間會遇到困難，會出現試探，會埋怨、也會犯罪。教會好比途中的休息站，又給我們豎立指標，指點明確的方向。教我們籍着耶穌的恩寵，讓我們通過祈禱、默想、和告解等聖事，得以繼續行走天國之路，以抵達永遠的活水源頭。我們作為一個基督徒，天國是我們永遠堅持的目標，不要為了世間短暫的逸樂，而失去天主賞賜的永遠福樂。願我們時常在意志上、精神上武裝自己，充滿信心，以堅強的毅力去走天國之路。願天主降福你們。

## 本 週 讀 經

二 零 一 四 年 三 月 廿 三 日

出 17:3-7; 羅 5:1-8; 若 4:5-42