



## Third Sunday of Lent March 27, 2011 A

### Reflections on a wonderful Gospel

Today's wonderful Gospel of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well is only proclaimed once every three years in church.

I hope you take time not only to read the following reflections on today's powerful Gospel, but also to *prayerfully meditate* on them.

#### Treating every person with respect and not as an "it."

Jay Cormier offers the following two reflections.

*In 1923, the Jewish theologian Martin Buber wrote an immensely influential little book entitled *I and Thou*. Buber's main point is that there are two ways of relating to other people in our lives: We can see them as objects to be used—what Buber calls an "I-it" relationship or we can see others as having feelings, dreams and needs as real and as important as our own that can be the basis for dialogue and relationship—an "I-Thou" relationship.*

*In his memoirs, Buber tells the story of how he came to his theory of I-Thou and I-It. When he was a professor of philosophy at a university in Germany, a young student came to see him. The student had received his draft notice to serve in the German army in World War I. He was a pacifist by nature and afraid of being killed in battle, but, at the same time, he was a loyal and fiercely patriotic German.*

*He asked Buber what he should do: serve his country and risk being killed or claim conscientious objector status and perhaps leave another young man to be killed in his place.*

*Buber was in the midst of a difficult theological-philosophical treatise and was annoyed at the young man's claim on his time and attention. The professor said something along the lines of that's a serious dilemma; do what you think is right.*

*The young man, in despair for lack of guidance, committed suicide, and Buber, for the rest of his life, felt a measure of guilt for not being more present to that young man, for seeing him only as an interruption and not as a human soul in torment. Buber felt he had sinned against the image of God in that young student by treating him as an object without needs and feelings.*

From "The Lord is My Shepherd: Healing Wisdom of the Twenty-third Psalm" by Harold S. Kushner.

It is so easy to treat others as objects, to measure their worth by what they are able to do for us. We carelessly dismiss as unimportant if not undesirable those who distract us from our own agendas, who demand too much from us, who make us uncomfortable, who fail to live up to our expectations. We expect a great deal from one another—sometimes too much—and it seems there is no end to our disappointment in our spouses, our children (our parents!), our coworkers, our neighbors. Our standards of what is right and proper often drive some people to the edges of society, far away from us. The Samaritan woman is one such victim. Her religious background and her nationality make her a nonperson in the eyes of Judaism; her lifestyle makes her a pariah among her own. But rather than reject her, Jesus calls forth from her a sense of faith and joy that enables her to confront her life, and in telling others of her encounter with Jesus, she becomes a source of faith and joy for others. May we be able to do the same: to move beyond the failings of others and our disappointment in them in order to call forth the good they possess and make it possible for them to use those gifts for the good of all.

#### Christ at 50th Street

Sometimes the Gospel is played out in surprising ways and in unexpected places. From *The New York Times*:

*As theatergoers and commuters boarded the subway car at 50th Street, they saw a 40-ish woman, fighting back tears, standing silently in the middle of the car.*

*She was holding a sign, colorful and legible but not always understandable, written mostly in English, with some Spanish. It explained that she was destitute and asked for help or money.*

*Most ignored her—except for a young, bespectacled man in a red parka who was reading a book in Spanish. As the woman passed, he called her over and, after some difficulty maneuvering her backpack, she sat down next to him. He put his arm around her and started speaking to her in Spanish.*

*They prayed together briefly, and then he arranged his parka around her shoulders and continued talking to her. As he spoke, she ceased being a panhandler—a "nonperson"—and became a person, and a very needy one.*

*A man who witnessed the scene with his wife remembers: "When we left the car on 14th Street, they were still conversing. We had entered the subway mildly depressed*

*[having spent an afternoon at a terrible play]. We left exhilarated, the afternoon redeemed: how often does one see a genuine saint in action?"*

From "Metropolitan Diary" The New York Times, Dec. 29, 2003

*On that subway train, Christ was as alive and present as he is in today's Gospel. The young man in the red parka possesses the Spirit of God that sees beyond labels and rumors and appearances and lifts the poor woman up to dignity and hope—just as Jesus does for the Samaritan woman. All of us who have encountered Jesus are called to be reconcilers, not judges; we are called to lift people up, not drive them to their knees. To be disciples of Jesus is to reach out and bring forth from one another the good each one of us possesses as a son and daughter of God. In so many ordinary ways we can help one another realize new life and hope in Christ if we are willing to tear down the walls that divide us, to reach over the distances between us, to build bridges over chasms of mistrust and prejudice.*

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### **Memoir of the Samaritan Woman**

The following meditation is by Fr. Alfred McBride, O Praem, my mentor and helper with all of my articles on the Catechism and Books of the Bible and author of many books. Fr. Al places the following words in the mouth of the Samaritan woman.

*I have become a disciple of Jesus Christ and an enthusiastic promoter of his message. Jesus came into my life and taught me to be honest about myself. He offered me the honesty that led to my salvation.*

*How did it happen? One year ago, I made my way to Jacob's well to draw water. I saw a man by the well. No one else was in sight. The encounter made me nervous on two accounts; first, because I was alone with a strange man in an isolated place, and second because I discovered he was Jewish and I am a Samaritan. Jews and Samaritans have despised each other for centuries, ever since the Civil War that split northern Samaria from southern Judea.*

*To my surprise, the stranger treated me with courtesy and friendliness. He seemed intent on alleviating any fears I might have. In asking me for a drink of water, he placed himself in my hands. I was suspicious and asked him if he really wanted a favor from a Samaritan. He had a way of elevating a simple conversation. Ignoring sarcasm, he began talking of living water in that parched landscape.*

*He saw that my soul was more in need of what he called "living waters" than was his thirst for regular water. He freed me to argue with him like the rabbis do. I protested he didn't even have a bucket for ordinary water, so what was he trying to say. Seeming to enjoy my growing*

*involvement, he said he could offer water that satisfies the heart. According to him, I would not thirst again.*

*As our discussion became more animated, I felt more relaxed. I felt like teasing him. "Sir, give me that kind of water and I won't ever have to come and carry water again." I knew he was not talking about physical water, but I wanted to see how he would reply. That's when he penetrated my defense. He asked me to bring my husband. I said I had no husband. He then confronted me with the truth of my five marriages. "The man you live with now is not a husband." I was astonished that he could know this about me. I did not want my moral life looked at. I changed the discussion to the dispute about worship between Samaritans and Jews, as to which group worshipped on the right mountain.*

*Jesus went along with my diversion but continued to offer me a sense of acceptance and even forgiveness. He told me that a day is coming when true worshipers will adore the Father in spirit and in truth. I felt grateful that he spoke of a time when a new religious unity would happen. I had not faced up to my need for salvation until I had met this compassionate man. Before I knew it, the words rushed from my mouth. "I seek the Savior." Jesus allowed some time to pass before he said, "I am he who speaks with you."*

*I was surprised by joy and the flash of recognition that was my privilege to experience. We had no more to say to each other. The enthusiasm of faith and forgiveness that filled my heart drove me to go back to my village and tell them the Good News. I felt like I had truly fallen in love for the first time, because I sensed a divine love that honored me and healed me. At first, my friends laughed at my excitement and noted I had left my jar back at the well. But I convinced them to go and see for themselves. They went to the well, met Jesus, and were so impressed that they asked him to stay a while in the village. Many of them came to believe in Jesus, not just on my word, but in hearing him directly.*

### **My commentary on the Sunday Readings**

For many years, I have written commentaries on the Sunday Readings for individual and small group use. The commentaries with Faith-Sharing Questions are used by several parishes in our deanery and other parts of the country. If you are visiting us today, I will appreciate it if you tell your local pastor or Director of Religious Education about this free resource.

For information on Fr. Eamon Tobin's writings, go to: [eamontobin.com](http://eamontobin.com) and click on the menu that lists various writing of Fr. Tobin.

Have a blessed week,

*Fr Eamon*