



THE LORD'S DAY

3rd Sunday of Lent (Year A)

The Watermead Apostolate offers this weekly page as a helpful guide and background to the readings used at the Catholic Mass for each Sunday of the Year.

The reading guides were written by Fr John Daley (RIP) who served as a Catholic priest in various parishes around the UK and world for 53 years.

Fr John co-founded Watermead in 1992 as a voice for people who wished to share understanding of living their faith through their God-given gifts and talents.

'The Lord's Day' incorporates some of those voices in this presentation and also through its many publications ~ books, resources, cards, music, etc.

Further information on what we produce, our story and the mission of our Christian apostolate can be found by visiting www.watermead-apostolate.co.uk

First Reading

Exodus 17 :3-7

In chapter 14 the Israelites cross the Sea of Reeds (chapter 15) and sing a song of victory and rejoicing; but immediately afterwards grumble about having only bitter water to drink at a place called Marah (bitterness). In chapter 16 they murmur again about having no food, and God sends quails and manna. The murmurs subside, but in chapter 17 they begin again. The people make camp at Rephidim where there is no water. Why pitch camp where there is no water, we wonder, and we recall the numbers said to have left Egypt - 600,000 families and their flocks (12:37-38)! Where could there be water for such a multitude? This is more than history . . .

The people blame Moses, in today's reading, and he deflects the anger towards God. The Lord reminds Moses he still has the staff which he stretched over the waters of the Sea of Reeds: he must use it again. Moses does, and water flows from the rock. The tradition became that the rock travelled with the people through the desert and always provided them with water. Massah and Meribah mean "testing" and "opposing" - the Israelite attitudes towards the Lord. Read on (vv.8-16) for an extraordinary battle.

THE RIGHT WAY TO GOD

Israel test God by grumbling;
Faith, not Law, brings salvation;
Jesus, a gentle man.

*This week I shall . . .
be gentle and strong*

Second Reading

Romans 5 : 1-2, 5-8

Paul has spent the early chapters of this letter on establishing faith as the basis of salvation, rather than the following of the Law of Moses. In chapter 4 he chooses Abraham as the supreme example of faith for his trusting in God - of whom he had never heard - and leaving home and family to travel to the Promised Land.

This was all before the Law and circumcision, says Paul, which proves for him that faith such as Abraham's is greater than circumcision and the Law.

In today's reading faith brings the grace of salvation. Through Jesus, we look forward to sharing eternal life, in fulfilment of hope: in God's love we receive the Holy Spirit.

Paul looks at human helplessness and is overwhelmed by the truth that Christ died for us when we were sinners. For someone good, we understand, we all might be prepared to die: but God's goodness loved and redeemed us, though we did not deserve such love.

Wisdom from the Saints

"The same rain falls on the whole world and turns white in the lily, red in the rose and purple in the violet. Water is like the Holy Spirit"

St. Cyril of Jerusalem



Gospel Reading

John 4 : 5-42

Notice the careful staging in today's reading. It begins at the sixth hour, which allows the seventh hour for the conversion of the Samaritan woman - just as the healing of the nobleman's son takes place at the seventh hour (4:52) three days later.

All the disciples go shopping, leaving Jesus alone to speak to the woman when she arrives (at the hottest time of day!) for water. The drama unfolds.

The woman is surprised a Jew would ask a Samaritan for water, realises that she has an advantage (a bucket) over him and begins to mock him - "Give me some of that water" (v.15).

Jesus challenges her. She has had five husbands - symbolising the land of Samaria which was resettled after the Assyrian conquest (721 BC) with five separate peoples. The woman symbolises the Samaritan peoples . . .

She turns to religious argument and loses. Jesus has won her. Her mocking, her pretentiousness and religious bias collapse before the Messiah - and then she wins her fellow villagers to like Jesus. They ask him to stay, and he does for two days. On the third day he moves to Capernaum, and there is another miracle . . .

Questions of Faith

Testing God In today's first reading the people test God, not trusting divine providence. In later centuries King David tested God by ordering a census - an act of pride. King Saul had already tried God by not obeying the divine will in time of war. And the prophets talk about the unfaithfulness of Israel as being like that of a wife's unfaithfulness to her husband - Israel played the harlot, testing the God who loved her.

Before Jesus began his ministry he went into the wilderness and refused to test God's goodness. He was the new Israel, faithful to God in all circumstances "Do not put us to the test", "lead us not into temptation" means "help us to be faithful".

People of God

St. David. Wales celebrates its patron saint in March. David was born in south-west Wales and his early years were guided by his mother, St. Non. As a young man David established a monastery at a place called Mynyw (Menevia - today's name for the diocese in that part of Wales) which was later called after him "St. David's". He was a strict abbot, nicknamed "the Waterman" because water was the only drink allowed in the monastery. The monks hardly ever spoke, they prayed constantly even during their work, and their food was bread, vegetables and salt. If a new monk wanted to join the monastery he had to wait at the gate for ten days before he would be admitted. David reluctantly accepted to become primate of the Church in Wales and was greatly admired. He died around AD 590, about the time that St. Augustine of Canterbury came from Rome to convert the Anglo-Saxons. Sadly, the Church in Wales had never shared the Christian faith with its Anglo-Saxon conquerors.