



The Holy See

MASS AT THE ROMAN PARISH OF ST GELASIUS I

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II
READ BY CARD. CAMILLO RUINI

Third Sunday of Lent
3 March 2002

1. *"Lord ... give me this water, that I may not thirst"* (Jn 4,15 ; cf. Gospel Acclamation). The request of the Samaritan woman marks a crucial turning-point in her long and intense conversation with Jesus that takes place at Jacob's well, near the city of Sychar. St John recounts it in today's Gospel.

Christ asks the woman *"Give me a drink"* (v. 7). His material thirst symbolizes a far deeper reality: it expresses his ardent desire that his dialogue partner and her fellow-citizens will open themselves to faith. The Samaritan woman, when she asks Christ for water, is basically revealing the need for salvation present in every heart. And the Lord is revealed as the one who offers the living water of the Spirit, that satisfies forever the infinite thirst of every human being.

The liturgy for this Third Sunday of Lent presents a splendid commentary on the Johannine episode when it says in the preface that Jesus *"so deeply thirsted"* for the salvation of the Samaritan woman that *"he set on fire in her the flame of God's love"*.

2. The episode of the Samaritan woman charts the journey of faith that we are all called to pursue. Even today Jesus continues *"to thirst"*, namely, to desire humanity's faith and love. From our personal encounter with him, if we recognize and receive him as the Messiah, come our attachment to his message of salvation and the desire to spread it in the world.

This is what happens in the rest of the Gospel passage. The bond with Jesus totally transforms the life of the woman who hurries without delay to proclaim the good news to the people in the

nearby village: *"Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"* (Jn 4,29).

Revelation received with faith asks to become a word proclaimed to others, witnessed in the concrete choices of life. This is the mission of believers, coming from and growing in their personal meeting with the Lord.

3. Dear brothers and sisters of the Parish of St Gelasius! I cordially greet Cardinal Ruini, Vicar of Rome, the Auxiliary Bishop of the sector, Fr Albino Marin, your dear parish priest, the curate, and all of you, members of the parish community who are celebrating your 30th anniversary this year. I warmly greet all who live of this densely populated area of Rebibbia.

I congratulate you on what you are doing, above all, in the work of catechesis, the liturgy and charity. In fact, they are the permanent pillars of Christian life and are to be developed with the aid of the support and services of organization and formation offered by pastoral offices of the Vicariate. Indeed, every parish community grows more united and active when it walks in affective and effective communion with its legitimate Pastors and the entire diocesan family.

Pay special attention to families, so that they may fully realize their vocation. Even if they should encounter difficulties in conjugal life or in the education of their children, may they never cease to remember the fundamental "yes" that husband and wife declared on their wedding day. God never lets those who trust in him lack the support of grace.

4. Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, continue to carry out with dedication that specific apostolic work that is so necessary for the life of the Church: the permanent Mission. This is a precious heritage, the result of the City Mission and the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. Taking on the problems of those who live in this area gives you the possibility of offering them the concrete witness of God's infinite love. In addition to the visits to families and the efforts to build friendly relations with people, may you also take pains to intensify fruitful experiences of formation that benefit children and young people, such as the children's choir and the after-school recreation centre. If you inculcate confidence in these boys and girls, they will be generous apostles among their peers and actively cooperate in the parish projects.

Dear young people, I make an appointment with you along with your other friends from other Roman parishes, for the meeting we will celebrate in St Peter's Square 21 March to prepare for the World Youth Day that will take place in Toronto this July. There is also the Diocesan Ecclesial Convention in June on the subject of vocations. Your parish community is preparing for this event with community reflection and, above all, prayer. May God raise up among you many holy priestly, religious and missionary vocations, that are essential for the life and future of the Church.

5. *"Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the*

Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5,5).

The words of the Apostle Paul in the second reading refer to the gift of the Spirit, symbolized by the living water, that Jesus promises to the Samaritan woman. The Spirit is the "pledge" of the definitive salvation that God has promised to us. Man cannot live without hope. Many hopes go down when they crash against the rocks of life. However Christian hope "does not disappoint" because it is based on the solid foundation of faith in the love of God revealed in Christ.

To Mary, Mother of hope, I entrust your parish and the Lenten journey towards Easter. May Mary, who followed her Son Jesus to the Cross, help us all to be faithful disciples of the one who makes well up in our hearts the water for eternal life (cf. Jn 4,14).

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