

14-2-2023

3rd Sunday of Lent - 12 March 2023

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Recommended Citation

Doran, Anthony. "3rd Sunday of Lent - 12 March 2023." *Pastoral Liturgy* 53, no. 2 (2022): 16-6. <https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/pastoral-liturgy/vol53/iss2/9>

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12 March 2023

Third Sunday of Lent

Reflection by Anthony Doran

Pastoral Note: Third Sunday of Lent – First Scrutiny

Vincent Glynn

For parishes with candidates for the RCIA, this is the first Sunday of the three Scrutinies. These three Scrutinies are 'rites for self-searching and repentance and have above all a spiritual purpose' (RCIA 128).

The Scrutiny is celebrated after the homily in which the celebrant is encouraged to explain the meaning of the first scrutiny in the light of the Lenten liturgy and in particular to encourage the elect that through the exorcism 'their spirit is filled with Christ the Redeemer, who is the living water' as found in the gospel of the Samaritan women proclaimed on this Sunday (RCIA 130).

During this Third Week of Lent the elect are presented with the Creed. The presentation takes place within a Mass celebrated in the presence of a community of faithful' (RCIA 144).

Introduction

Water. Light. Life. As we journey with our elect, this Sunday, we read the first of the three great gospels of the Scrutinies – a story of God's thirst for us and our thirst for God. Lord, give us some of that water!

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you are living water. Lord have mercy.

You bring us to freedom in the Spirit. Christ have mercy.

You have the words of everlasting life. Lord have mercy.

Collect

The Oration

O God, author of every mercy and of all goodness,

who in fasting, prayer and almsgiving

have shown us a remedy for sin,

look graciously on this confession of our lowliness,

that we, who are bowed down by our conscience,
may always be lifted up by your mercy.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.

To stand before God is inevitably to 'confess our lowliness'! The opening oration from the most ancient layers of Lenten prayers is one of the most compelling collects in the missal, hope filled, meditative and true to our nature. The invocation offers the rationale for Christian penitence. God is named as the author of all mercy and all goodness. The sense of authorship should not be underplayed. In the prayer tradition the 'authoring' of God implies continued upholding, sustaining and completion. What God begins, the divine does not abandon. Our penitential practices, intensified in Lent but belonging to the Christian life as a whole, are fasting, prayer and almsgiving. Following longstanding Christian belief, they are a remedy for sin. We, for our part, caught up in this mercy and goodness, express who we are. In conscience we stand bowed, 'confessing our lowliness'. This beautiful ancient expression captures our humility as sinners yet our confidence as believers. We who are bowed low know that in mercy and goodness we are able to be lifted. Even to feel the extent of our lowliness is a gift from the author of every mercy and all goodness. It is a fitting prayer for the first scrutiny of the catechumens.

Acknowledgement

The discussion of the collect, slightly adapted, was composed by Gerard Moore for the Canadian liturgical journal *Celebrate!* (Novalis Press). Our thanks to them for permission to reuse the material.

First Reading

Exodus 17:3-7

In the midst of their desert sojourn, the thirsty Israelites begin to doubt God's goodness. To allay both their thirst and their doubt, through the ministry of Moses, God provides water for the people to drink.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 94(95):1-2, 6-9

If today you hear God's voice, harden not your hearts.

Today's responsorial psalm alludes to the episode we read in the first reading. We are called to enter and praise God, the rock who saves us, not to harden our hearts as our forebears once did in the desert.

Second Reading

Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

Today's second reading is another reflection by Paul on the many gifts now given to us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Here, Paul uses the beautiful image of God's love poured into our hearts.

Gospel Reading

John 4:5-42 or John 4:5-15, 19-26, 39-42

This Sunday, with our elect, we read the story of the woman at the well: a story of so much more than water to drink, but a story of the One who wishes to encounter us and give us to drink the water of eternal life.

Reflection

The Exodus of the Chosen People from Egypt is certainly a most important event in the history of salvation. Having been kept as slaves in Egypt, Moses leads the Holy People of God into freedom into the Promised Land through the Red Sea. We will sing about these saving acts of God in a few weeks at the Easter Vigil. But it was not all plain sailing, as our first reading today tells us.

Having been delivered from slavery in Egypt, the forty-year journey to the Promised Land may have seemed just a bit much. Today's reading tells us that the people were 'tormented by thirst.' Not surprising, really. Deserts are hot, dry places. Of course, the people would have been thirsty.

But this physical thirst of the people, led in turn, to a spiritual thirst. They begin to doubt that the Lord could in fact satisfy their every need: 'Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Was it so that I should die of thirst, my children too, and my cattle?' When we are truly thirsty, we can begin to doubt. These people are at the end of their tether, and this has caused them to doubt the mighty acts of God who brought them out of slavery in Egypt into freedom in the Promised Land.

In his hour of need, Moses turns to the only one who can help him. He prays to the Lord for help. And he is directed to strike the rock from which water would flow for the people to drink. And this Moses did. In an act that is almost liturgical, he strikes the rock. And the water flows. And the thirst of the people – both physical and spiritual – was satisfied.

Today's Gospel Reading also talks about thirst. Jesus comes to the well and asks for a drink. But the Samaritan woman does not understand. She is thinking in purely practical terms: 'You have no bucket, and the well is deep.'

Jesus is not deterred: 'If only you knew what God is offering...and he would have given you living water.' And to the woman, this living water sounds pretty good. Because with this living water, she would never have to come to the well again to

draw water. Still, she has not quite understood. It is only when Jesus told her 'everything she ever did' that she begins to have some inkling that this living water is more than just the water from Jacob's well.

Slowly, she is beginning to understand something of what Paul talks about in the second reading. That 'the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.' Already she understands that whatever thirst we might have, God satisfies our every thirst, and gives us the food that satisfies our every hunger.

Today's gospel reading does talk about thirst. And having heard this Gospel, we might all nod knowingly and say that it is the Samaritan woman who is thirsty. And, yes, she is. But is she the only one who thirsts?

When we read the Gospel closely, we learn that it is in fact Jesus who first says: 'Give me a drink.' Any move we ever make for the living water, any move we ever make towards God is always only a response to the God who first thirsts for us. As our elect stand before us today for the First Scrutiny we see beautifully and powerfully God's thirst for us and our thirst for God. There, beside the well, Christ comes to meet our elect and indeed every one of us. And it is he who first seeks us and asks for a drink. Jesus thirsts: his asking for a drink arises from the depths of God's desire for us. Whether we realise it or not, our prayer, our every effort to find and meet God is the encounter of God's thirst with our thirst. Our reaching up to meet God in prayer is in fact also God reaching down to embrace us in love. Indeed, as St Augustine reminds us: 'God thirsts...that we may thirst for him.'



The tree of knowledge
of good and evil was
in the middle of
the garden.

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

As we continue our Lenten Journey, let us give voice to our needs and the needs of all the world to God our Father, creator of heaven and earth.

Petitions

We pray for the Church spread throughout the world, and especially Pope Francis, that he may continue to lead your Church in anticipation of the joy of the resurrection as we move towards the Synod.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all the world leaders that they, like Jesus Christ in the desert, may overcome the temptations of the devil and may be able to exercise their office for the good of all people.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who thirst for the truth like the woman at the well. May they be led to Jesus through the witness of Christians who live the good news of Jesus Christ.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who are suffering all over the world. In this time of Lent, we pray especially for the poor among us, and that we may have the generosity to enter into the joy of almsgiving as well as gratitude for what they receive.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for us gathered here today. We pray that our complaining attitude, like that of the Israelites in the desert, may change to an attitude of thankfulness and generosity.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who have died and those who mourn. May they be comforted and find through their grieving that they are refreshed and grateful to God.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

Loving Father, as we turn to you in this time of prayer, hear our petitions and grant them according to your will, through the power of the Spirit, and in the name of your Son, Jesus.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Third Sunday of Lent, Year A (12 March 2023)

Title	AOV1	AOV2	CWB	CWBII	GA
As the deer longs	120				38
Be not afraid	114			653	449
Christ is made the sure foundation			640		482
Come to the feast	151				400
Come to the water (Andersen)	74			473	
Come to the water (Foley)					403
Flow river flow	163				
Grant to us, O Lord			698	291	303
I heard the voice of Jesus say	54			512	468
I lift up my soul	102				
Jesus, in your heart we find			724	397	464
O God, you search me		35		572	
O sun of justice				178	2
Praise the one who breaks the darkness				584	
Shepherd of souls, in love come feed us			804	596	
There's a wideness in God's mercy			838	624	
Tree of life				300	307
Unless a grain of wheat	35			635	500

Title	AOVNG	S&S1	S&S2
If today		74	
If today you hear his voice			269
Jesus, bread of life	80		

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 94: *If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.*

	CWB	GA	JOBA	LPA	PM
Psalm 94	334	55	pg. 32	pg. 33	pg. 68

Music selections by Michael Mangan

Be with us (FWS) *Based on Ps 90/91* [Gathering, Gifts]

Create a new heart (FWS) *Based on Ps 50/51* [Gathering, Gifts, Recessional]

If today you hear his voice (LCC) *Ps 94/95* [Children's Lectionary]

This is the time (TT) [Gathering, Recessional]

Lenten acclamation (TT) [Gospel Acclamation]

Lenten gospel acclamation – Mass Jubilee (MJC) [Gospel Acclamation]

Turn back to God (TT/SYJ) [CHILDREN: Gathering, Recessional]