



## March 20, 2022

### Third Sunday in Lent

*"We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world." —John 4:42<sup>i</sup>*



Dear Friends;

Last week, I spoke about the need for us to have a direct experience of God. I said that Christianity is about a relationship not rules. That if we do not have a direct faith experience of God, we cannot expect our children to be drawn to our life of faith, they will only see it as a set of rules. I was speaking of the Church in general and not about parents specifically. There are many parents who have a deep faith life and whose children do not believe. That is not anyone's fault. We need to remember that faith is a gift and we all must travel our own road to the divine. And each will discover God in their own unique way.

I was saying the Church needs to focus on the experiential aspects of faith as opposed to rules and structures. We face many challenges to being formed in a relationship with Jesus. If we are lucky, we get an hour of catechesis (the teaching of Jesus) each week. Many of us do not know the Scriptures well. We do not know how to think like Jesus. We are more likely to read the Gospel through our political persuasions rather than shape our attitudes based on a relation with Jesus. We miss who Jesus truly is and who he calls us to be.

Alan Jacobs a professor of humanities at Baylor University recently was quoted to say, *"People come to believe what they are most thoroughly and intensely catechized to believe, and that catechesis comes not from the churches but from the media they consume, or rather the media that consume them. The churches have barely better than a snowball's chance in hell of shaping most people's lives...The real miracle here is that even so, in the mercy of God, many people do find their way to places of real love of God and neighbor."*

Scholars tell us that the Gospel of John may have started as a catechesis. It was preparing learners to become members of the body of Christ—the faith community. John is introducing us to Jesus. Today and the following two weeks we will hear three stories that reveal Jesus as Living Water, Light and Life. Part of getting to know Jesus is not just information but formation. We are being formed to live like him. We shape our lives around who he is and what he values. Then we can be his living presence in the world.

Today we hear about the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well. The first thing to notice is Jesus crosses cultural boundaries. Firstly, Jesus speaks to an unchaperoned woman in public. This is culturally suspicious. Secondly, she is from the Samaritans who Jewish people normally avoided. Next, she is at the well at the wrong time for women. This could mean she has been shunned by the other women for shameless behavior (five husbands and now living with someone other than her husband). Finally, she brazenly talks to Jesus about "masculine" subjects, the political and religious. And Jesus accepts her questions and doesn't try to push the conversation toward "feminine" topics.

Jesus is subverting the traditional culture. This is an innovation. This Gospel is trying to confirm new roles for women and the acceptance of Samaritans into the faith community. Jesus not only talks with the woman, but in his time with her, he carefully guides her from ignorance and misunderstanding to enlightenment and understanding. Jesus engages and teaches her. She moves from the scornful identification "Judean" for Jesus to "sir" to "prophet" and finally "Messiah." Then she goes forth boldly into the world of men (the public marketplace) and proclaims her new relationship with Jesus. And many came to believe her. Later they will experience for themselves that Jesus is the One who saves us. Her intense encounter with Jesus leads to an astonishing and rapid insight into who Jesus really is. Would that we all would make such rapid progress as she and her village!

Lent is a season of fasting. As we journey to the renewal of our baptismal covenant at Easter, we should fast from hours of media we consume and limit its influence. Then we will be free to feast on Jesus the Word of God. We can come to know his thirst for us. And in turn know him as the Living Water of Life that quenches our thirst for meaning and purpose. The water is fine, let us not be afraid to take the plunge! We too like Jesus can create innovative ways of crossing boundaries to welcome and include all in our fellowship.

Peace,

*Fr Ron*

*Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: [www.anne.church](http://www.anne.church)*

<sup>i</sup> On the third, fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent we change to Cycle "A" readings since we have elect at the parish who are preparing for the Easter Sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist). There are prayers for them based on these readings.