

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Third Sunday of Lent  
March 4, 2018  
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You know the Church's three-year cycle of Sunday Mass readings puts the focus on the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. But every year in Lent we are given an option. The option is to read from the Gospel of John. This is not to give St John equal time! Rather, it recognizes *the central place* the Fourth Gospel has in the proclamation of the Christian message. (Every year the Church lectionary turns to St John during the Easter season as well.)

The incident of Our Lord Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well is a case in point. With graphic detail St John memorably records the way in which eternal life is offered in Jesus Christ and how we may find that life. Pay attention to the conversation between Jesus and the woman. You will see in it an example of the pastoral way Jesus deals with your own soul.

At the end of the conversation with the woman there is one of those graphic details which can only belong to an eyewitness. When the disciples returned to Jesus they were surprised the Master had been talking to a Samaritan woman. The conversation had already ended, and when the woman left, someone noticed "the woman left her water pot." *She meant to come back.* Her leaving the pot at the well was a sign she was coming in faith to Jesus. And just as with the apostles Andrew and Matthew, her first impulse was to go to her people and tell them about this man.

The whole business put Jesus in a happy and expansive mood. He forgot about the need for food and the weariness which were the stated concerns at the outset of the incident. Instead, the Lord spoke about having a different kind of food, and He went on about the coming harvest. The disciples must have thought the Master had been out in the sun too long! But they were respectful. As they listened to Jesus talk about the harvest, if someone had looked up and away, he would have noticed the long line of townspeople already coming out of Sychar and heading for the well!

Christ had not yet talked to these people. They had only heard *about* Him from the Samaritan woman. Yet the eyes of the Son of God saw the first ray of gospel light in their souls. He saw the long development of their faith in Him that would

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produce an everlasting harvest. (Perhaps these people were the spiritual ancestors of the Palestinian Christians who are suffering so terribly right now in their homeland.) We can only stand in awe of the thought of what Christ knew but did not tell us. What we do know, however, is that St John proclaimed Christ accepted these Samaritans even at the inception of their salvation, as already on the way to eternal life.

The trust of Jesus Christ is magnanimous and kingly. It is a challenge to my loyalty and yours. We disappoint Him often. But we can never consent to betray His absolute confidence in us. Jesus is seen here as so happy, so triumphant, in this first earthly opportunity to be revealed as *Salvator mundi*, Savior of the World, that it can only strengthen our resolve to strive for perfection once again.

Never forget we too, like these poor souls streaming out from Sychar to meet the Lord, can cause that joyful smile on the lips of Blessed Jesus, as He sees the first steps of faith, and counts the harvest certain.