

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The 3rd Sunday of Lent
March 7, 2021

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In the long and fascinating account of the Our Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well, when the conversation ended and she left, it was noticed: “the woman left her water pot.” It is a good rule of thumb when reading the Fourth Gospel to remember St John always means more than he says. “The woman left her water pot” means *she meant to come back*. Her leaving the pot at the well is a sign she was coming to faith in Jesus. And, like the apostles Andrew and Matthew, her first impulse was to go to her people and tell them about this amazing man.

Every year in Lent Holy Church offers to break off from the three-year cycle of readings and give us the option of reading from St John’s Gospel. Always take the option! This is not just to give St John equal time with Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It is in recognition of *the central place* the Fourth Gospel has in the proclamation of the Christian message.

This account of Our Lord with the Samaritan woman at the well is a case in point. With graphic details, such as the water pot, St John memorably records the way in which eternal life is offered in Jesus Christ and how we may find that life. When you pay attention to the conversation between the Lord and the woman you see in it an example of the pastoral way Jesus deals with your own soul.

The Samaritan woman was coming to faith, and she went to tell others about Jesus. And this put Our Lord in a happy and expansive mood. He forgot about physical hunger and the weariness (which were the concerns stated prior to the encounter with the woman.) When the disciples returned with food they had to listen to the Lord talk about having a different kind of food to eat. And He went on about the coming harvest of souls. The disciples must have thought Jesus had been out in the sun too long! But they were respectful. And as they listened to Jesus talk about the harvest, if one of them had turned around, he would have seen the 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. Sychar, we are sometimes told, means “city of liars.” Yet the eyes of the Son of God saw in these souls the first ray of gospel light. Jesus saw in them a maturing development of faith in Him which would produce an everlasting

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harvest. These people were the spiritual ancestors of Palestinians and Christians throughout the Middle East who have been suffering so terribly for the past fifty years. That caused Pope St John Paul II to desire to visit Iraq, a visit now realized by Pope Francis. St John's gospel proclaims that these Samaritans, even *before* the inception of their faith, were accepted by Christ as already on the way to eternal life. We can only stand in awe of what Our Lord Jesus knew but did not tell us.

It is a magnanimous and kingly trust we see revealed in Jesus in this incident. That trust is a challenge to my loyalty and yours. We disappoint Him often. Israel's whole salvation history is a record of God's faithfulness and man's infidelity. But please God we can never consent to betray His absolute confidence in us. And we strive for perfection because of that Divine trust.

This is the first earthly opportunity for Christ to be revealed as *Salvator mundi*, savior of the world. No wonder it put Him in a happy and expansive mood! Never forget that we too, just like these poor souls streaming out from the city of liars to meet the Lord, can cause that joyful smile on the face of the Blessed Lord, as He sees the first small steps of faith, and counts the harvest certain.