Our Sunday Readings

EXODUS 17:3-7
PSALM 95:1-2,6-9
ROMANS 5:1-2,5-8
JOHN 4:5-42
(or 4:5-15,19b-26,39a,40-42)

THE SCRUTINIES
The Gospel passages in Cycle A for the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Sundays of Lent are from the Gospel of John. We’ve used them for centuries to prepare people who wish to be baptized. When a local community has people preparing for baptism, these readings become part of a ritual called “The Scrutinies.” These readings help us to scrutinize Jesus. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we also look more closely at the sin in our lives and confess our need for God’s savior.

EXODUS 17:3-7
Reading closely
1. Where are the Israelites?
2. Where are the Israelites coming from?
3. How have things changed for the people?
4. What might life have been like after Egypt?
5. What are the people feeling? Why?
6. What might God be “feeling?”
7. What might Moses be feeling?
8. What exactly does God tell Moses to do?
9. What is the significance of the staff?
Living the word
10. Do your feelings toward God change from one experience to the next? Have you been thankful one moment only to complain later?

THE FIRST READING
Complaining
God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt in a dramatic display of power that included plagues, environmental disasters, and, finally, the death of their enemies’ firstborn sons. Despite all that God did, the Israelites keep grumbling about how things were better in Egypt than in the Sinai desert.

God provides the people with water, just as he previously gave them manna and quail (Ex 16). By sustaining their physical needs, God is trying to teach this wayward people that they can trust him to protect and lead them. God will always be faithful to his people, even if his people aren’t always faithful to him.
Jesus ignores cultural and religious boundaries in order to talk with this lone (and lonely?) woman.

- The Jews thought Samaritans had set up a false worship of God, so they avoided them.
- It was improper for a male to be alone with a female who wasn’t a relative.
- The woman was getting water during a hot time of day, which suggests the other village women excluded her.

Jesus offers the woman living water. Although she doesn’t realize it yet, this water is infinitely greater than the water from Jacob’s well. Jacob is the father of the tribes of Israel, which makes the well an important religious site. Jesus, however, is of much greater importance.

Who is this guy?
Jesus reveals what he knows about the woman not to shame her but to help her believe in him. She, in turn, accepts that he has prophetic insight. Because she believes that he is a prophet, she asks him about the proper worship of God, a major concern of the Old Testament prophets (v.20).

Jesus first says that the Jews are properly worshiping God, but then he says it doesn’t matter: the hour (the time) has come for the Father to replace all forms of worship. Jesus offers people living water (principally the Holy Spirit) so they can worship truly. The woman believes God will send someone to reveal this true worship. Jesus replies that he is the one God has sent (v.26).

Reaping the harvest
The woman leaves her physical thirst and rushes to tell others that Jesus will quench their spiritual needs. She’s part of the harvest of people whom Jesus gathers. She also becomes a gatherer herself by bringing others to Jesus (v.28f).

The Samaritans go out to see Jesus because of the woman’s testimony. They treat Jesus as kindly as he treated the woman. After spending time with him, the villagers are able to call Jesus the savior because of their own experience of him.

Jesus’ work
The Gospel of John presents Jesus as the one who reveals the Father. Jesus gives people the Spirit of God so that they can believe in him and through him have eternal life. Bringing people to faith is Jesus’ work and the work of all who believe (v.34f).

PRAYER
adapted from a prayer by St. Columban
Merciful God, good Lord, unite me to that fountain where I may drink of the living spring of the water of life. May I dwell in that heavenly region, delighted with abundant sweetness. May I say: “How sweet is the fountain of living water which never fails, the water welling up to eternal life.”
O God, you are the fountain we desire, the fountain we yearn to consume forever. Lord Jesus, give us this water always. Amen.