

DECIDING FOR LIFE: 3RD SUNDAY OF LENT (A)

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Decisions! Decisions! Decisions! Life is full of them. Many are not particularly important. Many are routine. But sometimes we sense a need deep inside us to make a decision that is different. One that is going to change our lives so much that life will never be the same again! We decide, e.g. to take our problem to a counsellor. We join a support group for help with an addiction. We accept an offer of friendship. We join a club. We meet someone special and fall in love. We answer an advertisement for a job that will take us interstate or overseas. We leave a higher paying job for one with more meaning or one in which we can be more helpful to others. We quit hanging out with friends whose standards and values are dragging us down. We sense a call from God to work for others as a church worker or a social worker.

The change we need or want to make requires us to leave a lot behind, leave our comfort zones and alter our lifestyles. But the promise of better days ahead impels us to take this brand new direction in our journey of life.

We see this happening today with *'the woman at the well'* who seemingly by chance, comes across Jesus resting on Jacob's well in Samaria. It happens like this: - It is mid-day. Jesus is thirsty. He is thirsty for water, but even more he is thirsty for a meaningful connection with the woman, generally considered by Jews an alien and outsider. The story-teller does not give her a name because she represents every one of us. Her conversation with Jesus includes symbols and word-plays. Eventually he breaks through her sarcasm and her other defences and touches the guilty secrets of her life. After five husbands already, her current live-in lover is not her husband at all!

His focus on her past life is not to hurt her but to expand her vision and offer her hope. She grasps that in the unexpected friendship this stranger is now offering her, something new and wonderful is happening. She understands that even in her messed-up life, God is getting involved and reaching out to her. So much so, that she cannot but ask herself: *'Who is this man who is so different from all the others I've known? Why is he so different? Why is he so respectful? Why is he so attentive? Why is he so kind and caring? Is he perhaps greater than our father, Jacob? Could he possibly be a prophet with a message from God? Could he even be the Messiah promised us?'*

She is now the one who is thirsty. She is thirsting, longing, craving, to get to know him better. As they continue their conversation she finds that Jesus is satisfying not only her thirst to know him better, but also her longing and determination to get a life, a brand new life, a better life than ever before.

It is his interest in her, his words, his gestures, his whole attitude, together with the time and space he is giving her that's making all the difference. He is as purifying, refreshing and invigorating to her as a stream of running water. She is sensing something of the truth spoken by St Paul in our Second Reading today: *'... the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit ... given to us'*. She is sensing that Jesus loves her, and that God in Jesus loves her. At long last she has come to realize one thing for sure. Life will never be the same again

because she will never be the same again.

This is all so true that she decides that she cannot keep him to herself. She feels compelled to bring others to him too. So we find her running to her village and shouting at the top of her voice to anyone and everyone who will listen, the good news about him. She blurts out: *'He just told me everything I've ever done.'* Touched by her excitement and enthusiasm, the villagers beg Jesus to stay with them. He ends up staying two whole days. His words and presence make such a deep impression that they end up saying to the woman: *'Now we no longer believe because of what you have told us; we have heard him for ourselves and we know that he really is the saviour of the world.'*

Our story of *'the woman at the well'* asks us to remember today all the ways we have experienced the presence of Jesus to us, and all the ways we have experienced his love for us. It asks us to consider how humble, kind, sensitive, understanding and forgiving he has been with us. It asks us in return to extend the firm hand of friendship and the over-flowing waters of mercy, compassion, acceptance, kindness and forgiveness, to all the people who come into our lives day by day. Family, friends, workmates, strangers, customers, clients, patients, students, anybody and everybody!

This touching story of the goodness and kindness of Jesus goes with the words of our psalm today, *'if today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts'*. So much so that we too will want to go to Jesus, the Saviour of the world in Holy Communion, and beg him to stay with us. To stay with us and be for us and others that very same living, refreshing, life-giving water that he was to one truly blessed woman, known for evermore as *'the woman at the well'*!