

Third Sunday of Lent, Year A, Catechist - RCLB Lectionary



Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session read all the readings.

Exodus 17:3-7

Psalms 95: 1-2, 6-7, 8-9

Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

John 4:5-42 [or (short form) 4:5-15, 19-26, 39, 40-42]

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Was there a particular reading that appealed to you? Was there a word or image that engaged you?

Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need for the session.

The Word In Liturgy

On the first two Sundays of Lent, all three years of the Lectionary cycle focus on important events in the life of Jesus: the temptation in the desert (Lent 1) and the transfiguration (Lent 2). However, for the next three Sundays, each year has its own particular focus. The readings chosen for Year A during these three weeks have ancient associations with the catechesis given to candidates for Easter baptism. Prior to Lent's expansion to a forty-day period, when it lasted only three weeks, today's gospel was read on the first Sunday of Lent, next Sunday's gospel (the man born blind) on the second Sunday, and the following Sunday's (Lazarus) on the third Sunday. The theme of water that is so prominent in today's texts is an unmistakable reflection of the baptismal focus of these readings, yet there is a richness to them that is much broader than catechesis for baptism.

The particular focus for the catechesis based on today's readings has to do with our understanding of faith as God's gift. In the gospel, Jesus invites the woman to come to faith in him. Scholars have suggested that the woman is an image of faithlessness—that of Israel, Samaria, and indeed all of us. She is an image of every infidelity borne of trying to quench our cravings on something other than the "living water" of God's love. Jesus links his offer of "living water" with his offer of the gift of faith: the opportunity he presents for the woman to recognize him as the Messiah ("I who speak to you am he"). Jesus alone can give this gift of life-giving water, water that elsewhere in John's gospel is identified as being "the Spirit that those who came to believe in him were to receive" (John 7:39).



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The first reading teaches by way of contrast. The grumbling, mistrust, and lack of gratitude—shown by the Israelites in the desert is the antithesis of the attitudes called for in those who have accepted God's gift of faith. Moses, the great intercessor, in whom Christian tradition has discerned an image of Christ the mediator, is contrasted with the Israelites. In the face of their mistrust, he believes in God's power to save; in the face of their grumbling, he lifts his hands in prayer; in answer to their testing ("Is the Lord in our midst or not?"), he proves God's presence by striking the rock to bring forth water.

Catholic Doctrine

Faith as a Gift

While faith is the believer's response to God, that response is prompted by the initiative of God's action in reaching out to us. In other words, God acts first. It is only because of God's initiative that a relationship can develop between the human person and the divine. The theological term for this is grace. God acts graciously toward us, extending to us an offer of being in relationship. We, in turn, are given the freedom to respond, accepting or rejecting this offer. In a sense, it is upon the meeting ground of faith that God's grace and human freedom intersect.

An individual can believe only because God's grace is active in that person's life through the Spirit. But, at the same time, a believing stance is only possible because a person is free to choose. This ability to choose another in freedom, which is characteristic of our deepest relationships, such as friendship or marriage, is also true of our relationship with God in faith. This choice can only be effective if it is authentic, a true human act which surrenders to the promise of the other. To trust in the promises of God is not an evacuation of our human will or instincts but the truest sign of our human dignity (CCC 154).

It is not so much that we have faith in God because we are able to investigate and grasp truths independently or to process intellectually what is proposed to us by divine revelation. It is rather that our whole self is grasped by the illuminating power of God which draws us or immerses us into intimacy and friendship with the divine. In our Catholic way of conceiving of faith, it is a way of being, a whole way of life in concert with the God who prepares the ground for this relationship in love.