

## The Deacon's Bench



# The Third Sunday of Lent: Who is Scrutinizing Whom?

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Reflections  
on Sacred  
Scripture

Water, light and life, basic to our humanity, are featured during the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent as our catechumens who have now become 'Elect' prepare for baptism during the Easter Triduum. Over successive weeks, the Gospel stories of the Woman at the Well, Healing of The Man Born Blind, and the Raising of Lazarus reflect the transcendent and spiritual meaning of water, light, and life respectively.

These readings are not primarily moral lessons teaching us the right and wrong way to live, they are mystagogical revelations of what Baptism accomplishes. Each Gospel reveals Christ progressively as Living Water, the Light of the World, and the Resurrection and Life. Taken together they illustrate the spiritual and deeply human journey from thirst - to blindness - to death - and ultimately to new life. This is what we experience on our various paths through life, and this is what Jesus came to bring us, new life.

Based on the three Gospels, the Elect are called forth after the homily each of these weeks for a prayer called a *Scrutiny*. The prayer asks God to deliver the Elect from all that is weak or sinful, and to strengthen what is good in them. Ultimately the prayer is for them to be freed from sin and to have a deep and abiding desire for Christ. But that prayer is not just for them, it is for all of us that we may grow deeper into the Baptismal life we are living. It is the Holy Spirit who scrutinized them - and all of us. "... For the Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God" (1 Cor. 2:10). Our response lies in the depths of our hearts.

Today's account of the Samaritan Woman at the Well is about thirst and desire, about broken relationships and misunderstanding, it is about coming awake to faith. It occurs here after the encounter between Jesus and this foreign woman that is frankly contentious. Socially and culturally, it is off limits for her to speak to Jesus who is a Jew and a man. Their encounter was shocking to the disciples, but the Samaritan Woman took the good news to heart that Jesus is the awaited messiah, the one who will give her living water, the one who will save the whole world, Jews and Samaritans alike. She goes as an apostle to her town to share this good news: "Come see a man who has told me everything I have done. Could he possibly be the Christ?"

A key to the understanding this Gospel's relevance to the Elect preparing for the Easter Sacraments, is heard in the voice of the Samaritan townspeople who say to the woman after she witnessed faith in Jesus to them, "We no longer believe because of your word, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world." This response is what we pray for our Elect; it is what we pray for ourselves and all believers. That we come to know Jesus is the one we thirst for, Jesus is Lord!