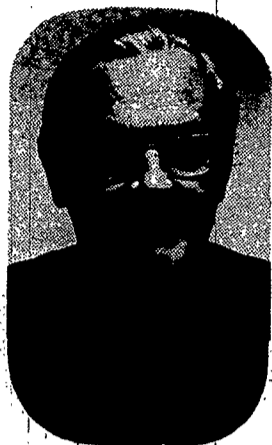


PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

The Stranger at the Well

The story of the Samaritan woman, that we heard in last Sunday's liturgy, is surely one of the most stirring narratives in the New Testament. It has color, dialogue, drama — everything required for a magnificent short story. It presents an unforgettable



picture of Jesus: weary, sitting by the well, yet alert to the needs of a lonely woman. The character of the Samaritan woman is marvelously drawn. She appears to be so self-confident, so aggressive, so sure of her ground, so glib in her conversation; yet beneath the surface she is seen to be a lonely, insecure woman. It is significant that she comes to the well alone. For in an oriental town coming to get water at the town well was a social event for the women, something like our coffee hour: it was a popular gathering place where they exchanged greetings and news. The fact that the Samaritan woman did not come to the well when the other women did suggests strongly that she may have been out of favor with them. So she comes alone.

To her surprise, when she arrives at the well, expecting to be alone, she meets a Stranger and the meeting changes her life. It is worth noting how in the story she comes progressively to realize more fully who this Stranger is. At first, he is just an ordinary person to her, an ordinary Jew. She asks: "How is it that you, a Jew, asks a drink of me who am a Samaritan woman? Something about him, however, makes her see that he is a person deserving of special respect. So we find her addressing him as: 'Sir.' He speaks with her, responds to her questions, talks to her in a way that no one had ever talked before. She

experiences a new insight. She recognizes him as a prophet: "I see that you are a prophet." Finally, as they continue to speak, she is overwhelmed by his presence and insights and asks the question: "Can this be the Messiah?"

The story of the Samaritan woman is the story of a very human person looking for meaning in life (she had gone through five marriages in search of life's meaning). It is the story of a woman probing the religious values that had been given to her and finally coming to realize that this Stranger at the well had offered her the answers she was looking for.

Indeed, the story of the Samaritan woman is the story of every one of us: looking for deeper meaning in life, probing the values that have been handed down to us and striving to make them our own or to replace them with a better set of values. We cannot really understand the Christian answer to the riddle of human life, till we have begun to confront the right questions. We cannot be satisfied simply with a faith and a value system that has been handed down to us but that we have never made our own by personal appropriation. We cannot come to understand how much the Stranger at the well means to us until we have come face to face with the stark reality that life has no meaning for us without God and without the Christ who reveals God to us.

Sometimes parents find it difficult to watch their children questioning values and truths which to them seem unassailable. Yet asking questions about faith is not the same thing as rejecting it; indeed, asking questions may be a necessary step for young people and older toward making Christian faith and values

truly their own.

Sometimes the path to faith can be, as it was for the Samaritan woman, a lonely one. As someone has said "No one can take your bath for you and no one can die your death for you." So, no one can live your faith for you. Yet lonely though the path to faith may sometimes be, there is always the prospect that along that path we may meet the Stranger at the Well.

The Bishop's
Public
Appointments

MARCH

- 3 — Priesthood Ordination, Church of the Assumption, Fairport — 7:30 p.m.
- 3 — Division Directors' Meeting — 1:30 p.m.
- 5 — Confirmation, St. Lucy Church, Retsof — 3:00 p.m.
- 6 — New York State Bishops' Meeting, New York City — 11:00 a.m.
- 7 — Priests' Council Meeting, Becket Hall — 10:30 a.m.
- 7 — Division Directors' Meeting — 1:30 p.m.
- 8 — Seder Supper, St. Thomas the Apostle Parish, Rochester 7:45 p.m.
- 9 — Confirmation, Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Rochester — 7:45 p.m.
- 10 — Celebration of Eucharist and Homily, Catholic School Principals' Day of Recollection, Nazareth Motherhouse — 2:30 p.m.
- 12 — Confirmation, Holy Family Church, Auburn — 2:00 p.m.
- 12 — Confirmation, St. Alphonsus Church, Auburn — 4:30 p.m.
- 13 — Episcopal Ordination of Most Reverend Thomas J. Costello D.D., Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, Syracuse — 4:00 p.m.
- 13 — Confirmation, Sacred Heart Church, Auburn — 7:45 p.m.
- 14 — Division Directors' Meeting — 1:30 p.m.
- 16 — Meeting of the Board of Trustees of Courier-Journal — 11:30 a.m.
- 17 — Confirmation, Our Lady of Mercy Church, Greece — 7:45 p.m.
- 18 — Diocesan Pastoral Council Meeting, Sheraton Inn, Canandaigua — 12:45-4 p.m.
- 19 — Palm Sunday Diocesan Choirs' Concert, St. Thomas More Church.
- 21 — Regional Coordinators' Meeting, Pastoral Office — 1:00 p.m.
- 21 — Diocesan Chrism Mass, Sacred Heart Cathedral — 8:00 p.m.
- 23 — Holy Thursday Celebration of Eucharist and Homily, St. Thomas the Apostle Church, Rochester — 7:45 p.m.
- 24 — Eddie Meath Show, WHEC-TV, Channel 10 — 7:00 a.m.
- 25 — Radio Message, Family Rosary Network — 7:00 p.m.
- 26 — Celebration of Resurrection Liturgy and Homily, WHEC-TV, Channel 10 — 8:00 a.m.
- 26 — Celebration of Resurrection Liturgy and Homily, Sacred Heart Cathedral — 10:00 a.m.

Lent — A Sense of Passing Time

Following is the text of the address given by Pope Paul VI during the general audience on Wednesday, Feb. 8.

The Church has always given a normative importance to the succession of time during the annual chronological cycle, and distributes therein, with great preciseness, its pedagogy, both spiritual and ascetic. Lent is a special period, an important period.



We must be aware of this traditional discipline of the Church, which confers on the calendar a particular authority and gives a spiritual sense of passing time.

A member of the faithful cannot be indifferent to the solar and seasonal succession of the days, as if they were all the same, and did not require to be lived in a certain way. We know how important the weekly distribution of the days is. Even in the civil calendar it has its law, which declares the first day of the week a holiday and which imposes on the Christian a special religious observance, that is, participating in the Mass, in the community, liturgical assembly in celebration of the sacred Word and of the eucharistic sacrifice.

The recent Council confirmed this norm as a result of which "the Lord's Day is the original feast day, and it should be proposed to the faithful and taught to them so that it may become in fact a day of joy and of freedom from work." We know this well; and we will do well to consider this norm always as fundamental in our religious and civil behavior, which also leads us to give greater importance to the period that precedes and prepares for Easter, namely Lent.

Lent is a period of sacramental preparation. For the sacrament of baptism, in the first place, for the neophytes. For Christians already baptized, Lent will not be only a mere reminder of the first great purifying and generative sacrament already received, but it will be a psychological and moral renewal carried out by baptism itself. The latter entails with the acceptance of the faith a lifestyle in keeping with it, as from a logical and mystical principle, according to St. Paul's classic words: "He who through faith is righteous shall live," an operation which is always in the act of development and exercise.

Then Lent is ordained to the reconciliation of penitents. The whole doctrine on sin, committed after baptism, has here also an ineffable conclusion, which is concentrated in the peace of a conscience restored to friendship with God by means of the sacrament of penance. Thus Lenten preparation is crowned with readiness for the paschal celebration, when the eucharistic sacrifice will admit the faithful to communion with Christ himself, "our paschal lamb, sacrificed" for us.

And around these Sacraments the life of the faithful is practiced and transformed. It is characterized by an emphasizing of religious fervor, asceticism and charity. Listening to the divine word becomes more attentive and assiduous. And if today the Christian crowds have thinned out at systematic Lenten preaching, every thoughtful Christian should find the time and the opportunity to attend at least one Easter preparation preached for some particular group, since this form of preaching is fortunately so widespread and has become easy of access. Thus the lamp of prayer, almost instinctively, or rather on account of the mysterious meeting with the Spirit, present in the soul, is lit again and confers on the Lenten atmosphere a light of its own, reminiscent of weeping and joy.

And what has remained of the obligation of the Lenten fast and abstinence? Once so binding, so severe, and almost so ritualized, does nothing remain any more? Apart from the two days of fast which are still obligatory for those capable (that is Ash Wednesday and then Good Friday, the "great and bitter day"), the binding obligation of past years has been taken away by the Church, sensitive to the changed and demanding conditions of modern life. But what remains for strong, faithful spirits is all the more worthy of our vigilant recollection; it can be summed up in two words, supplementary to the ancient fasting: personal austerity in food, in entertainment, in work . . . in charity for our neighbor, for those who are suffering, who need help, who are waiting for our assistance and our forgiveness . . . All this remains, as likewise remains the obligation of abstinence on every Friday of Lent. In fact this varied, spontaneous and not always easy program calls for our choice, our effort, our austerity. Only austerity makes Christian life strong and authentic.

Let austerity, contrary to the laxity that is fashionable today, be the unostentatious but sincere and strengthening practice of our Christian repentance!