March 23, 2014
Third Sunday of Lent

The Different Roads to Christ: The Outsider: An Unlikely Evangelizer

On the Third Sunday of Lent the Church invites us to reflect on the Samaritan woman’s encounter with Jesus. Because she is a sinful woman, her own neighbors want nothing to do with her. She is forced to go for water at noon when the sun burns bright in the sky. She cannot enjoy the banter of the other women of the town who travel together to the cistern in the cool of the morning and evening. Who knows, she may even be a regular subject of their idle talk as they trade gossip about their town and their families. Do they fear that they will catch the sin of adultery if they include her in their daily life?

The Samaritan woman is just one more broken person Jesus encounters on the road. But, why did He engage her when so many would not? What did He see in her? Did he feel pity for her because she walked alone? With just the two of them at the cistern, Jesus does use this encounter to condemn her fellow citizens for ostracizing her. But, He also does not engage in their rejection of her either. Although the disciples may not have been aware of her many sins they were shocked that Jesus has not ignored her – a Samaritan and a woman. No, living in a culture of many restricted social rules, Jesus makes no attempt to be held by conventional limitations. He has something greater to do than to protect His own reputation or to worry about how His own disciples might interpret His actions.

In that one simple demand of this outsider, “Give me something to drink,” Jesus begins a relationship with this woman that defies the restrictions of His time. By speaking to her when no one else would have dared, He acknowledges her dignity as a daughter of God with as much right to charity and justice as anyone else. By talking to her, Jesus will not allow the solitary confinement of her own choices to hold her prisoner for one second more. He frees her to see the truth about who she is and He frees her to proclaim her new found freedom.

She runs to the town and regardless of her former standing in the community the Samaritan woman speaks to all those who wanted nothing to do with her. Does she tell them of their own hypocrisy? That would simply be a waste of time. She wants to share what Jesus has given back to her – dignity and hope. What was it in her voice and in her manner – this outsider – this public sinner – that resonated with her formerly hostile neighbors? Was it the voice of honesty: “Come meet the man who told me all my sins…” Was it the hope they heard in her question: “Could this be the Chosen One?”

Whatever the reason, the Samaritans – considered outsiders themselves to the Jews among whom they lived – they listen to her word! How astounding to think, this adulteress, this most shunned among the shunned, evangelizes her very own tormentors! “Come and see,” she says. “Come and meet Jesus!” “Believe in the words I say.” Talk about the new evangelization! The message of God’s love and mercy is proclaimed simply, directly by a woman – a Samaritan woman – a sinful, Samaritan woman! You can’t get more outside than that!

When was the last time I invited others to meet the Savior of the World?