

Lent 3A

In some parts of India they provide resting places along the dusty road for those who carry heavy loads on their heads. Such a resting place is called a *sumatanga*. These lay-byes have a shelf where the traveller can easily drop his or her burden. Referring to one of these, a native Christian said: "Christ is my sumatanga". He was precisely that for the Samaritan woman. She seemed weighed down by more than just buckets of water.

Coming to draw water alone and not with the other women at the hottest time of the day rather than in the early morning, as was the custom, suggests a certain estrangement from the locals. Because of her unwise life choices she seems ill-at-ease with herself.

Having five husbands wouldn't have helped. We hear of people these days who go from one relationship to another, but they're chasing after the wind. But Lent is not the time for pointing the finger at anyone but facing up to what weighs us down and robs us of peace.

The woman tries a diversionary tactic by dragging disputed questions of race or religion into the conversation. (they say you should never argue about politics and religion or should that be politics and sport). She tries to start an argument with Jesus but he gently turns the spotlight back on her. Have we ever tried to change the subject when we cannot face up to what we've done or dressed it up as something else? Jesus tells the woman that he, and only He, will be able to quench her thirst for inner peace and wholeness both here and in the hereafter.

Jesus revealed the woman to herself. "*He told me all I'd ever done*", she said. It's comforting to know that Jesus knows everything we too have ever done, good and bad, in our lifetime

and he's still there for us. Pope St John Paul 11 once said that 'in prayer God reveals a person to themselves'. Self-revelation is no bad thing especially if we, like the Samaritan, have been searching for fulfilment in the wrong places. You've heard the expression 'drowning one's sorrows in drink'. When the drink wears off the sorrows come back worse than ever. But what Jesus has to offer will never wear off. It will be 'like a spring inside them welling up to Eternal Life'. Whoever drinks the water Jesus is offering will 'never be thirsty again'.

Just like this Samaritan lady, Jesus meets us where we are, but he doesn't want to leave us as we are especially if, like the Samaritan, we are in need of His forgiveness and peace. She came away a changed woman. What does Jesus want us to change in our lives – what burden do we need lifted?

If we keep coming to the Well of Life, which is Jesus, whether it be in private prayer or confession or the Mass itself, we'll realise that our burdens are being lifted. The gospel tells us that having taken His words to heart, the woman puts down her water jar by the well, dashes back to the village and can't wait to tell the whispering locals of her life-changing meeting with Jesus who revealed Himself to her as the long awaited Messiah. The isolation she felt in coming to the well on her own is now gone. There's a spring in her step. She eagerly shares her Good News with her fellow-villagers whom earlier she was trying to avoid. What a turn-around?

Dumping the heavy water jars by the well symbolises being set free from what weighed heavily on her heart.

So, this Lent let Christ be our 'sumatanga', our resting place, where, whatever is dragging us down can be lifted and, like the Samaritan woman, we can feel whole again.