

Reflection by Helen Hawkins

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When I said I would give a reflection for this reading I was not aware that the topic would be about The Woman at the Well. I do the bookkeeping and my husband runs a rural water company so it makes sense that I love this story. I could not have asked for a better topic.

The laws written in the first reading set the scene for the actions of Jesus in the second reading. In Genesis the Israelites are told to accept the aliens in their lands. In the story of The Woman at the Well, Jesus is the alien in the area of Samaria. It is a Samaritan who is confronted by Jesus and who is willing to talk to him.

I have been aware of the term "type" in theological discussions but it is only recently, thanks to Sharon and Doug's offering to lead various study groups, that I have come to understand how the term is used.

I assume that when St. Augustine uses the word "symbol" he is using the woman as a "type" to explain the Samaritan woman's actions to that of the Church. It has taken me some time to learn that using this term does not imply that the story is fiction. St. Augustine was a theologian grappling with understanding and teaching the meaning and purpose of the Church. He using this story to bring home his point. I don't mean to bypass the message in his commentary but I am going to go a different direction. I will look at a lesson that Jesus is giving us and one that, from what I have read of St. Dominic's life so far, a lesson St. Dominic understood very well.

Jesus was a master story teller. However He not only used stories to teach His apostles. He used actions. His conversation with the Samaritan Woman must have been a surreal moment for the woman and for his disciples. Nothing in the experience of the woman nor the disciples could have prepare them for this strange conversation. It is a situation that could never have been imagined or made up in the minds of Jesus' followers.

She is a woman who had had five husbands and was living with a man who was not then her husband so it makes sense that she was at the well alone. The village people may have avoided her or she may have wished to avoid them.

For some reason Jesus walked through Samaria from Judea to Galilee rather than take the normal route crossing the Jordan River to avoid Samaria. When he reached the well, his disciples were not with Him. They showed up just after the conversation between Jesus and the woman.

When Jesus approached she no doubt assumed that he would either ignore or harass her but he did neither. He simply asked her for a drink of water.

Each step of the way Jesus gently breaks down her barriers. He asks her if she would want living water. Living water! Only people who live in the desert and especially the women who for centuries have trudged daily up and down the road to provide water for their families can really understand what fresh water means. He has awoken her soul and intellect with a vision of heaven. With each exchange between the two, her comprehension of what He was offering her becomes clear. He was giving her

Living water that is more precious than the water she carries daily. Living water that changed her from an outcast to Jesus' first lay Dominican.