



Cycle A

Exodus 17:3-7
Romans 5:1-2, 5-8
John 4:5-42

GATHERING

(An unlit candle and a clear glass bowl of water rest on a table covered with a purple cloth.)

We reflect this week on our sense of the life-giving presence of God that flows through our lives. With the catechumens we pray for the strengthening of what is strong in our lives and for healing where we are weak. Last week we were invited to see God, our selves or another *in a new light*. When did you open your heart to see something or someone in a new way this past week? *(Members share briefly.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(The leader invites the community to a time of silent attention to God's presence. The candle is lit. After three minutes of silence, members join in singing, "Heal Us Lord". (The song may be found on the Internet.)

All: If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Leader: Come, let us sing joyfully to the LORD;
let us acclaim the Rock of our salvation.
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us joyfully sing psalms to him.

All: If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Leader: Come, let us bow down in worship;
let us kneel before the LORD who made us.
For he is our God,
and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides.

All: If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Leader: Oh, that today you would hear his voice:
"Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,
as in the day of Massah in the desert,
where your fathers tempted me;
they tested me though they had seen my works."

All: If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9

(The community pauses for another minute in silence.)

Focus Question

Reflect on a time or circumstance when you felt completely alone.

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the gospel reading, the facilitator invites members to mention a word, a phrase or an image from one of the readings that particularly struck them this week. Members then read over the commentary and consider the questions in silence for several minutes before entering

into conversation.)

Commentary

"Is the Lord in our midst or not?" Given the distance of time and knowing *the rest of the story*, as it were, we might be tempted to look down our noses at the petulant Israelites. After all, even though delivered from the bondage of Egypt they seem to be crying out to God, "So what have you done for us lately?" Sensing the presence of God is a mysterious thing.

"Is the Lord in our midst or not?" An ancient and ever new question, it seems, given that we have learned only recently that a sense of the absence of God pervaded Mother Teresa's life for most of her adult years. She lived forward in faith, but in the depths of excruciating darkness.

We ourselves today might well ask, "Where is God in this crazy, mixed up world, in our wounded church and in the brokenness we find in our own lives?" How strong is your sense of the presence of God? Where do you experience God's presence today?

Water equals life equals the presence of God: this is the equation at work in the scenes at Horeb and at Jacob's well. The water mediated through Moses keeps the people alive in the desert. The water Jesus offers to the Samaritan woman and to us is the pledge of eternal life. It is so because the water Jesus offers is nothing less than a participation in God's life, the communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Through her encounter with Jesus, the Samaritan woman comes to herself. In his presence she finds meaning and rescue from alienation. She returns to her town a wounded healer who brings others into his presence. Animated with living water welling up in our lives, we, too, even in our own incompleteness, are called to help others discover God's presence. We are saved not just for ourselves, but for the sake of mediating the experience of God's healing presence to others. The world needs to hear us proclaim: The Lord is in our midst!

We may not always feel it, but it is grounded in the trust that comes from faith that we know God's presence is the very ground of our being. It is the ground of all being. We depend on God's presence as we celebrate the scrutiny Sundays with our catechumens for these next three weeks. We test our hearts in these rites. In the presence of God we seek out what is sound and pray for

it's strengthening; we discern what is wounded or weak and pray for its healing. We pray for strengthening and healing in our own hearts, in those preparing for baptism, in our church and in our world.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ How strong is your sense of the presence of God? Where do you experience God's presence today?
- ◆ When have you felt that God was far, far away?
- ◆ When have you complained about what God wasn't doing for you?
- ◆ Name what is sound in your life for which you pray for strengthening.
- ◆ What might be weak or wounded for which you pray for healing?
- ◆ How have you helped another discover God's presence?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

- ◆ Set aside twenty minutes some day this week to sit simply in silent attentiveness to the presence of God. Ask God for nothing in these minutes. Simply be attentive to the stirring of God's presence in your heart.
- ◆ Support the church's efforts to protect access to clean water in the U.S. (www.ncrlc.com/water_commons.html) and overseas (www.crs.org).
- ◆ As a community send notes to the catechumens or candidates about to be baptized or received into the church at the Easter Vigil. Let them know that you are with them in these final weeks of prayer. Offer your prayers for strengthening and healing in their lives. Ask them to pray for you all.
- ◆ Learn about and participate in efforts to protect your water resources through a river, watershed or land trust organization in your area.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The leader calls members to silence. After a time of quiet, a member prays the poem that follows.)

God's Presence

Member: It is there that God works,
the back side of the tapestry,
the underside of life:
in dark alleys of fear and doubt,
on the margins of poverty and pain,
at the muddled crossroads of heartache.
Don't look for the Deity elsewhere,
at galas or balls or luxurious banquets.
The Divine dwells only at one address:
"Love's Lane."

Bishop Robert F. Morneau. **Ashes to Easter: Lenten Meditations.** (New York, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000)

(A selection of instrumental music is played as the community dwells in quiet.)

*When the music is complete, the leader invites members to collect their thoughts on what is sound and what is weak in their lives. After some time for reflection he/she invites members first to name what is strong and for which they pray that it be strengthened. In response to what each one names, members pray, "**Strengthen us, O God.**" Then the leader invites members to name what is weak and for which they pray for healing. In response to what each person names, members pray, "**Lay your healing hand upon us, O God.**"*

The session concludes with the praying of the Lord's Prayer and the exchange of a sign of peace.)