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## WORD MADE FLESH

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### **Third Sunday of Lent\***

Exodus 17:3-7, Psalm 95, Romans 5:1-2,5-8, John 4:5-42

"Prayer, fasting, and works of mercy," the sum total of the spiritual life. Prayer and fasting, the sole disciplines -- as a monk friend of mine often says -- for becoming a wonder-worker, a person who does the "works of mercy."

We have entered Lent, the time of softening, the Exodus, just as at baptism when the heart of stone is turned to a heart of flesh. A time of softening.

"Harden not your hearts," is the word of God spoken in all of today's readings. It speaks now as it did in the desert flight from captivity. And Moses, we read, took the elders of Israel and moved ahead of the complaining people, approached the rock at Horeb, struck it, and the water ran out to quench the thirst of all those who were in flight to freedom.

"Harden not your hearts as at Meribah, as on that day at Massah in the desert...."

The place of thirst comes, it seems, naturally enough in life. If not today, tomorrow then the barren place, the place of noon-day will be upon us. Parched — it is so parched a place, stumbled on perhaps, a place where we have lost our knowledge of the source of living water.

This thirst for sources comes naturally enough. For that very reason we are called to prepare ourselves, discipline our spirit and body so we will not be overcome by the arrival of the dreaded barren place, the desert, the dark night of the soul or the dark night of the senses.

The Gospel today is about water and we are called to become the spring of living water.

Jesus is at Jacob's well. The Samaritan woman is at the place of Massah, the hard, the barren place, the desert. Jesus meets her, jar in hand. It is the well of Jacob and Sarah, the well that made life flower amidst the struggles of their desert journey.

The water given at the well of Jacob, that water which was the source of life, was born of recognition. Recognition in the desert, the parched place, the place where all struggles to deny — through grasping again at the appearances of love and life or through growing cold and hard — were recognized by the one who anoints life, the Christ. Water, the source, that brings healing. This lovely woman at the well knows herself as if for the first time — and in that knowing she comes to life again and, as the text tells us, goes to her friends and neighbours and tells them to come and meet this person who has "known her" as no other. We do not know the name of the Samaritan woman. This is telling because it is precisely in such moments of recognition that we come to know who we are. In such moments we are "called by name," as the scriptures love to put it, called by name out of the desert, out of estrangement. In such moments we come to ourselves because, finally, we have come to the source of our life.

Lent is a time of softening. Prayer and fasting are the disciplines for softening the heart. Through them we come to recognize the sources of our life and of the life of the stranger and the enemy. In such recognition the waters of life begin to flow and that which is eternal in our life together puts forth leaves and blossoms, rendering the desert green.

Finding ourselves in the place of Massah we pray that we "harden not our hearts" and come finally to Jacob's well.

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