

## WASH AT THE SPRING

Readings: Is 44: 1-3; Lk 2: 41-52

In this very place, Mary said to Bernadette, “Go drink of the spring and wash yourself there”.

The pilgrimages of 2002, which we are preparing during these days, are meant to centre on that theme: *The Water of the Spring*.



When Mary gave that instruction, there was no spring to be seen. Bernadette dug with her bare hands until the water came – first a muddy trickle, then a strong flow.

The image that most immediately comes to mind, therefore, is of water appearing, bubbling up, rising from the earth. And pilgrims will, no doubt, reflect a great deal on that image during the pilgrimages this summer.

Perhaps today we might step back several millennia, long before the birth of Christ, and ask how the hidden spring came to be there in the first place. It was there because, over thousands of years, the water had seeped down into the earth, from rain and storms, from rivers and lakes, being purified as it passed through soil and rock, sinking ever deeper into the ground.

Water bubbles up in springs and rivers – but even more fundamentally what water does is to sink down, to soak in: “I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground”, God says (Is 44:3). And it is only because it has soaked into the thirsty ground that it can bear fruit in grasses and willows (Is 44:4). The water is drawn back up in the life which it causes to flourish.

When Pope John Paul addressed the Church on the task ahead of us in the new century, he said that all our renewal has to be founded on holiness. There is a danger of hearing those words and saying, “Of course! How true!”, and moving swiftly on to something we consider “more practical” – or is it that we see it as less challenging, less fundamental?

At the end of his account of the infancy of Jesus, St Luke tells us that, “Mary treasured all these things in her heart” (Lk 2:51). In other words, she allowed the truth about her Son to sink down, to soak into the depths of her being.

That is the meaning of any pilgrimage – to allow the word of God to call us, to challenge us, to seep into our being, to change us, and to make us fruitful.

Jesus promises the Samaritan woman, and promises us, that if we allow the water he gives us to soak into us, if we drink deeply of it, it will become in us a spring of water welling up to everlasting life.

He says to her: "If you only knew the gift of God" (Jn 4:10). The gift of God is the Holy Spirit, "the highest gift of God most high", "the Lord, the giver of life".

As we gather here at the spring which Bernadette found, we think of the water seeping into the earth to bring forth life.

The challenge for us is to allow the living water, the gift of the Spirit, to sink into every part of our lives. That is what water does. As it falls on the dry ground, it seeps and spreads. No part of the underlying soil remains untouched by the water which reaches everywhere. We come to Lourdes so that every corner, every nook and cranny, of our lives may be touched by the life-giving Spirit.

This is the same Spirit who overshadowed Mary at the Annunciation. It is the same Spirit of Truth who was treasured by Mary in her heart. It is the same Spirit who came on the Apostles in the Upper Room as they were gathered in prayer with Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

She was always open to God's Will, God's Word and God's Spirit: "Let it be with me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).

May our coming to her shrine help us to welcome the Spirit poured out on us. May that Spirit soak and seep into our lives. May his presence bring new life to the Church in a new century and be in us like a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

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