

FROM FR. CHRIS ALIMAJI'S DESK

Reflections on Lenten Scrutinies and Purifications

This Sunday's Morning Prayer concludes thus: "Father, you have taught us to overcome our sins by prayer, fasting and works of mercy. When we are discouraged by our weakness, give us confidence in your love." (Sunday, Week 3).

Beginning from today, Third Weekend of Lent to the Fifth, we have the choice of Readings, Years B & A. In this Reflection, I am focusing on the Year A Readings, specifically meant for Lenten Scrutinies. The purpose is for concluding the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) program, offered to Catechumens as they prepare to receive **the three Sacraments for full initiation into the Church**: Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist, on Easter Vigil night. Catechumens are unbaptized adults in Church. The Scrutinies are also appropriate and a great opportunity for all of us adults, especially those baptized in infancy. The word "scrutiny" says it all. Liturgically, the Scrutinies are parish community assistance to prepare the Catechumens through the Liturgy of the Word in communal worship. The Readings of Year A (**Ex 17:3-7; Rom 5:1-2, 5-8; Jn 4:5-42, and Psalm 95**) provide us with those didactic lessons in Scripture very appropriate for clarifying our intentions and our faith in Christ, hence the term Scrutinies and Purifications. We are to purify our minds and hearts with our beliefs and practices as Christians. Lent is the time we prepare ourselves for the Easter festival. **As I said a few weeks ago, we can only appreciate and enjoy the Easter mysteries if we participate adequately in the Lenten observances. That is where the fruits lie.** Our Reflections these last two weeks were very beneficial as we explored the encounter in the desert regarding Jesus' temptations and how through sacrifices humanity achieved transfiguration and transformation, (cf. Mk 1:12-15; Gen. 22:1-18; Mk 9:2-10).

The Samaritan woman in today's Gospel provided interesting picture of so many of us in our marriage with God or faith-experience. God seeks us out and prepares us again. After probing and scrutinizing our ways he forgives us, and we ought to become his messengers to our friends and neighbors. We are to invite them to become true worshippers who worship the true God "in Spirit and truth" (Jn. 4:23). I have referred to this verse several times. To scrutinize ourselves, therefore, do we really understand what we worship? Or why we worship? Or know the manner of worship? The passage has a subtle revelation of who Jesus is. We all know at this stage that water is a primary symbol in the Sacrament of Baptism. Today we focus on water and its ability to satisfy our physical and spiritual thirst. Both the first reading and the Gospel contain abundance of water, (cf. Ex. 17:3-7; Jn 4:5-42). God himself provided water for the thirsty people of Israel in the desert, using Moses as his chosen instrument. **In the Gospel the Lord Jesus entered into deep discussion with the Samaritan woman, and offered her water that will bring eternal life. During the encounter she discovered Jesus as the Messiah coming to "tell us everything." (John 4:25). That is the purification of faith we seek.**

For all Christians, the aspect of water in both Readings and the fields ripe for harvest, say much of our baptism and inclusion for eternal life. We must be ready to be gathered as "crops for eternal life", giving joy to both the Lord and the Church alike (cf. Jn. 4:36). Psalm 95 today concludes it all as we are invited to come and worship the Lord, listen to his voice, and not to harden our hearts, lest we perish like the grumblers in the desert of Rephidim who refused to ponder over God's goodness (cf. Ex. 17:2-3). Notice that "Many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him because of the word of the woman who testified" (John 4:39). She by testifying became Christ's evangelist instantly. Read again what the town folks said: "We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world." (John 4:42). If you are an Old Catholic, have you made this kind of breakthrough with people? That should be our goal or focus this season, having discovered Jesus ourselves. Our new and liberated life in Christ must break the barriers between peoples, and make us the unified new people of God, because God pours his love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom.

5:5). May the good Lord help us in our Lenten encounters to truly become convinced Christian believers and evangelizers! Amen.