

The background of the cover is a vibrant, high-angle photograph of a forest. A waterfall flows over large, moss-covered rocks in the lower half of the image. The water is white and frothy as it falls. The surrounding trees and foliage are a rich, saturated green, creating a sense of depth and tranquility. The overall lighting is soft and natural, highlighting the textures of the moss and the movement of the water.

# LIVING THE BEATITUDES

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A Journey to Life in Christ

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J. Brian Bransfield



# Introduction

Belief comes easily to the child. So, too, does fantasy. But, of course, belief and fantasy are far different. To fantasize is to pretend that the real is something it is not. Children fantasize or pretend when they use their imagination at play. It does not take much conjuring for a young boy to transform an L-shaped twig into a pistol and pretend to be a gangster of old. A group of children playing in the neighborhood pool on a summer's afternoon easily imagine that the inflatable raft is a sleek pirate ship on the run. Pretending is the magic of childhood that can turn the backyard into a famous battlefield of history, or a doll into a baby as when a little girl plays house.

Belief, on the other hand, is the opposite of fantasy. Belief engages the real to form a relationship. A child who believes in his or her parents grows up with simple confidence that generally his or her basic needs will be met. Loving parents will provide food to eat, a warm bed to sleep in, and comforting voices in times of distress. The child knows that someone will be

close by, the next day will dawn, and someone will smile and care. When a child believes in his or her teachers, coaches, classmates, and friends, a relationship opens naturally. Learning, training, camaraderie, and friendship arise from belief.

The child is an expert in believing. Even the everyday pressures, troubles, and fears of life become, for the child, an opportunity for belief. The sound of thunder is an opening to believe in the shelter of the home. Nightmares and even fictional monsters are openings to believe in the protection of guardian angels, the warmth of father and mother, and the security of family. The family and home are meant to become the enchanting locus of belief for the child.

Church, too, for the child, is a fascinating place of belief. The child's eyes widen to behold the images in stained glass windows depicting saints with swords conquering large dragons. Children scrutinize the shrines in the alcoves of a church. Such places serve to localize the belief that God guides and heals his people. The statues with arms spread wide seem larger than any danger the child will ever face. The stories of the Bible fill the child with the strong momentum of assurance that God knows what to do and delivers us in the end. The child can feel the relentless determination of the Wise Men, the courage of David before Goliath, the humble receptivity of the Virgin Mary, and, above all, the gentleness of Jesus. Children absorb every detail of the stories of the saints. Children believe the promise that God guides us and protects us in any peril. Children examine every inch of a holy card to see the attributes of the champions of belief. The child senses that the same God who led Abraham and stood by Moses will also act on his or her behalf.

Growing up can cramp our capacity to believe. The mystery was within reach when we were children: we *believed* it, and we believed God would protect us, be next to us, and guide

us. We believed God was on our side. We also believed that it was good to be good. We felt the connection of the church building and the people in it, with the apostles and Jesus. We felt the link between the Church and the rest of the world. The God we prayed to in church would continue to guide us as we stepped outside of church.

But then something happened. As we grew up, the world became complex and often painful. We walked more quickly past the stained glass windows and allowed the alcoves to gather dust. We no longer lingered before the shrines and the statues. We experienced tests and trials. We learned what the word “cancer” means. Hollywood blockbusters began to take the place of the biblical stories. Highly-paid actors and actresses captured our fantasy world. The people we thought would live forever, such as our parents and close friends, died. The world we once trusted hurt us. Our early beliefs were challenged and the fantasies of the world seemed to offer a quick escape.

Instead of storms outside in the night, storms raged inside. We felt a hunger deeper than that for food. We sensed a darkness even when the lights shone. The angels seemed to fly away, back into the stories. Monsters began to take the form of a “business as usual” world of trying to fit in and competing to get ahead. The devil, who uses disguise as a standard operating procedure (cf. 2 Cor 11:14), seemed more comfortable seated behind a desk in a suit and tie rather than with horns, a tail, and a pitchfork. The holy water seemed unable to wash away the more complex evil stains. Holy cards became sad reminders of the most recent wake or funeral we attended. It was more difficult to connect the worlds inside and outside the Church. They seemed to stop fitting together and grew apart. Many people stopped being naïve, only to become depressed. Success was no longer about doing the right thing, but about

doing my own thing. The connection between the Church and the rest of the world was severed.

This book is about restoring the connections. It is for faithful Catholics and for Catholics who want to be faithful. It is for the once faithful, and the less than faithful. This book is about making worlds fit together. It is about transforming our knowledge of faith into an accessible image, which will restore our capacity to believe and can then lodge deep in our memory. Adults long to access the spontaneous and ready faith of childhood that is still within us, waiting for us. We experience the daily thirst for a living relation and coherent connection between grace and daily life. We have seen enough of the world to know that sin exists. We want to understand not just how to be nice, but how to be *good*. Even though we may have been away from the practice of the faith for years, we sense the meaning of the sacraments in daily life. Yet, as adults, we often cannot find a way to reinvigorate our childhood beliefs and assimilate them into our adult faith. We thirst for the action of God to be relevant to the deepest questions of our life.

The primary tool in bringing the two worlds together is the ancient yet familiar image of the fountain that the Lord Jesus Christ himself used to describe God's action in the life of the believer: "Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says: 'Rivers of living water will flow from within him'" (Jn 7:37–38). This fountain is closer than we think. We are likely to hear its sound every Sunday. After the faithful have proclaimed "Holy, Holy, Holy" the priest prays the words of the Eucharistic Prayer. The former translation of the second Eucharistic Prayer begins, "Lord, you are holy indeed, the fountain of all holiness."<sup>1</sup> In the new

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1. Second Eucharistic Prayer, *The Roman Missal*, revised according to the second typical edition of the *Missale Romanum* (1975), March 1, 1985, for use in the dioceses of the United States of America.

translation of the *Roman Missal*, the prayer begins, “You are indeed Holy, O Lord, the fount of all holiness.”<sup>2</sup> These words go back to the second century of Christianity, to the ecclesiastical author Saint Hippolytus. These ancient words have stood the test of time. They remain with us today, common and familiar, yet unique and irreplaceable in the reality they describe. Grace, God’s love for us, is a strong and persistent fountain that flows into our souls and shows forth in our actions.

Yet many have forgotten the path to this fountain. For many, the brambles of shame have snarled the path to happiness and a peaceful relationship with God. Years of fear and exclusive focus on fire and brimstone have blocked that path. Instead, the sad detour of spirituality-lite has replaced it, reducing the spiritual life to vague emotionalism and surface sentimentality. Promises betrayed and one hypocrisy too many have eroded the path to God. We have forgotten the maps that lead us to this life-giving fountain. The purpose of this book is to show us the way back to the fountain, to prune away the overgrowth, to clear the debris from the trail, to remove the boulders from the middle of the path, and to invite the reader to the fountain of all holiness.

A familiar Gospel figure can help us as we go about this task. One day Jesus met a person very much like us. She was a Samaritan woman in the midst of her daily routine. She remembered the greatness of her childhood faith and referred to it as the memory of “Our father Jacob” (Jn 4:12). Queen Esther from the Old Testament also recalled her childhood faith in her moment of desolation: “As a child I was wont to hear from the people of the land of my fore-fathers that you,

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2. Second Eucharistic Prayer, *The Roman Missal*, revised according to the third typical edition of the *Missale Romanum* (2002), 2010, for use in the dioceses of the United States of America.

O LORD, chose Israel from among all peoples, and our fathers from among all their ancestors, as a lasting heritage, and that you fulfilled all your promises to them” (Est C:16).

The Holy Spirit revives our childhood faith in times of fear and pain, and encourages us in the words of the psalmist: “Cast your care upon the LORD, who will give you support” (Ps 55:23). The woman of Samaria lived with the pain of daily fear, hurt, and sin. Jesus knew the record of her painful past: “For you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband” (Jn 4:18). While the Lord Jesus is our ultimate guide, we will take as our helper this woman who met Jesus.<sup>3</sup> She is known only as “the Samaritan woman.” We never learn her name. She is anonymous to us, but in many ways we know her very well. She is very much like us. She knows the world of forgotten promises and sin. She also knows the world of a remembered hope and grace. She reaches out her hand to us.

## Method

This book is divided into two parts. The first part consists of four chapters that present the woman of Samaria as an image for modern Christians. She, in her thirst, meets the Lord Jesus *in his thirst*.

Chapter One describes the deeper meaning of the Samaritan woman’s encounter with Jesus. She encounters Jesus while going about her routine tasks and her daily pain. Similarly, our routine tasks and ongoing wounds carry a deeper

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3. Hans Urs von Balthasar notes the special character of every detail of the Gospel accounts in which Jesus meets the sinner. See *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics I, Seeing the Form* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 580.



dimension. Chapter One reveals that the invitation of Jesus surrounds us daily, especially in the place we are most wounded. His invitation is not an ultimatum, but a personal summons that addresses our deepest self. Jesus gradually introduces himself to the woman. For this introduction to be complete, she must allow Jesus to clear away her misconceptions and disordered attachments. So must we. The woman of Samaria can represent those who practice the faith regularly as well as those who have drifted. Jesus leads the Samaritan woman away from her fears and excuses to accept the gift that he offers. Jesus uses the image of the fountain to describe his gift. The gift Jesus offers is meant to become a fountain within the believer. The image of the fountain becomes the central image of the following chapters. This image is developed in such a way to help the believer understand the work the Holy Spirit carries out deep within the Christian.

Chapter Two propels us deeper into our own understanding of our identity. As we move past our fears, we discover that fear, despite its power, has a hidden gift. This chapter examines the popular understanding of identity as progress that so often drains the fountain from our lives and leads to emptiness and chaos. The authentic meaning of identity lies deep beneath our preconceived notions. To reach our deepest identity, we must pass through the common experience of fear. Only here do we discover the path to understand grace and virtue, not as antique theological terms, but as our daily energy and direction. Having moved through our fears we can begin to reach our hand into the gift of the fountain of God's grace.

Chapter Three invites us to consider images of the spiritual life and to reflect on the image of the fountain, especially the fountain of grace that flows from Jesus on the cross, as an effective and dramatic image for the spiritual life. This chapter begins by comparing our internal world to a treadmill of

thoughts and worries that so often weigh down our approach to life and spirituality. God interrupts our worries and leads us to the rich source of grace. Rather than a treadmill, the great saints portray the spiritual life as a ladder by which the believer is led through the difficulties of life. The image of the ladder is similar to that of the fountain. Jesus himself uses this image with the Samaritan woman (see Jn 4:14). In the pages that follow, this image becomes the central image for the life of God within us. Fountains are a surge of natural generosity from deep within that transform pressure into beauty. Fountains well up to refresh, cleanse, and sustain us. The self-gift of Jesus on the cross is the fountain of life eternal.

Chapter Four revisits the mysteries of the Trinity, human sin, the cross, and the call to holiness through the help of the image of the fountain. This chapter contrasts the popular mental picture of God with the mystery of the Trinity. The unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is an eternal gift of self, one to the other. The eternal Triune gift of self is presented as the basis for the temporal gift of self at the heart of the identity of the human person. This chapter explains how sin sabotages this gift of self and reduces the flow of the fountain through the insistent impulse for self-taking. The human person struggles to live a life of self-giving, but is continually confronted with the tendency to sin, in particular through the seven deadly sins. The effects of sin fester in us, inclining us to sin. The Christian cannot conquer sin and its effects with his or her own efforts. This chapter presents the mystery of the cross as God's response to sin. God offers his own gift of self in his Son as the source of grace by which we can receive his mercy. This gift of God alone conquers human sin. The life of the Christian is therefore a response to the call to holiness offered in the grace of God through the sacraments. This does not happen in some remote, automatic,

or magical fashion. The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (cf. Is 11:2) build the seven virtues (cf. 1 Cor 13:13; Wis 8:7.) within the believer. The virtues then form the believer to live the Beatitudes (cf. Mt 5:3–12). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that the “Beatitudes respond to the natural desire for happiness.”<sup>4</sup> The relation of the seven gifts to the virtues and the Beatitudes is the way each Christian is transformed to live a holy life and respond to the natural desire for happiness. This chapter prepares for Part II by explaining the traditional influence of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit to internalize the life of virtue so that we can live the Beatitudes.

The second part of the book consists of eight chapters on the Beatitudes. Each chapter focuses on a surge of the fountain of grace that the Holy Spirit longs to release in the heart of the believer. Each gift of the Holy Spirit strengthens a particular virtue in the Christian. The virtue, in turn, develops and forms the action proper to a particular beatitude. The gifts, virtues, and Beatitudes build on one another in a way similar to the upward surging momentum of a fountain. At the same time, a struggle ensues through battle with the seven deadly sins. The sins attempt to weigh down, dull, and curtail the life of grace so as to prevent the internalization of virtue. Each chapter deals with particular deadly sins opposed to a particular beatitude.

We now turn, then, to the Holy Spirit and ask him to take us to Jesus. We step onto the road together. We see a mysterious figure at a well. He looks up to us, and he turns to us, and he begins to speak to us. He is asking us a simple question.

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4. *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, no. 1718.



# PART I





## CHAPTER ONE

# The Woman of Samaria, Then and Now

### Timing Is Everything

One seemingly ordinary day Jesus was on his way from Judea to Galilee. The Gospel of Saint John tells us that to go from Judea to Galilee, “He *had to* pass through Samaria” (Jn 4:3). The Greek word used for *had* is *edei* (ἔδει), which means “it was necessary.”<sup>1</sup> Why does the Gospel emphasize that it was *necessary* that Jesus pass through Samaria on his way from Judea to Galilee? He could have taken another route. It was not a *geographic* necessity that Jesus travel to Galilee by way of

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1. For the significance of this term see Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics VII, Theology: The New Covenant* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 316, and *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory IV, The Action* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), 234. See also, Larry Paul Jones, *The Symbol of Water in the Gospel of John* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 95.

Samaria. So why did he choose that route? The first sentence of this Gospel passage suggests a task of urgent necessity is in the offing. The very first sentence already hints at the significance of the journey of Jesus: he had a *mission* on that journey. To find out the purpose of his mission we must follow Jesus in the Gospel passage and investigate further.

The passage continues as Jesus enters Samaria: “Jesus, tired from his journey, sat down there at the well. It was about noon” (Jn 4:6b). The route that Jesus has chosen has evidently taken its toll. The Gospel writer emphasizes that Jesus is tired from the journey and also notes it was noon. Jesus has traveled a long way and is now feeling the effects of the noon-time heat. In fact, Jesus is so tired that when he arrives at a well, he sits down. The facts appear ordinary enough: in the middle of a long journey, at the hottest time of the day, Jesus stops by a well for rest and refreshment. This happens every day. It appears the most ordinary of detours. Yet, that which appears ordinary, when taken into the mystery of Jesus, becomes extraordinary.

A well is no ordinary place. On the surface, a well is a source of water and refreshment. Yet, a well in the Old Testament is more than just a rest stop. Isaac and Rebekah (cf. Gn 24), Jacob and Leah, Jacob and Rachel (cf. Gn 29), Moses and Zipporah (cf. Ex 2), and Tobias and Sarah (cf. Tb 8) are all betrothed after meeting at a well. The well is the central place of communion in the biblical world. In the Old Testament, the well is a place of betrothal, the meeting place of spousal love.<sup>2</sup> On one level, the well is simply a place to pause for a drink of water. On a deeper level, the well is the

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2. See Warwick Neville “Old Testament Spousal Narratives: A Contribution to the ‘Nuptial Mystery’” *Dialoghi Sul Mistero Nuziale*, eds. G. Marengo and B. Ognibeni (Rome: Lateran University Press, 2003), 185–204. See also, Jean Daniélou, *Advent* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1951), 45. See also, Larry Paul Jones, *The Symbol of Water in the Gospel of John* (Salem, WI: Sheffield, 1999), 91–92.



meeting place of chaste spousal love. Jesus always travels on the deeper level. Thus he arrives at the locus of spousal love.

The noon hour is no ordinary time. The notation of time appears at first to be an incidental detail to set the scene within the Gospel passage. But the detail has much to tell us. At noon-time, the heat of the sun peaks in intensity. The sun burns directly overhead, driving away any natural shadows in which to hide or seek shelter. People withdraw. It is the lonely time. Noon is also the time when, in just a few short chapters in the Gospel of Saint John, Jesus will enter his lonely suffering on the cross. Just as the sun reaches its peak, the Son will reach his. Jesus pauses on this necessary journey, at the place of chaste spousal love, at the same hour in which he will mount the cross in the ultimate act of love.

Next, a seemingly common event takes place: "A woman of Samaria came to draw water" (Jn 4:7). The need for water is among our most basic and common. Yet, something *uncommon* happens here. Most people come to the well in the cool hours of morning or evening to perform the arduous task of drawing water from a great depth and hauling it the long distance back home. This lone woman arrives at noon when the sweltering heat of the day peaks. Why does she approach a routine place for a routine task at this irregular and most *unroutine* hour?

One reason may be her painful past, which Jesus will later point out to her: "For you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband" (Jn 4:18). She has been married and divorced five times. She is, by now, branded and burdened with a very public reputation. People talk about her and call her names. They point her out to others. Perhaps this is why she approaches the well at an unusual time. The crowd comes in the cool morning or evening. If she came at those times, the murmuring would be too much to endure. People

would stare. They would warn their children, “Don’t turn out like her; see what happened to her . . . listen to your parents, or else you’ll end up like her.” At noon, the crowd stays away because of the intense heat. Public opinion and gossip have segregated her to this worst, most arduous time for drawing water from the deep well. She would rather endure the scorching heat than the cruel, scornful glares of those who know her sinful past. She comes for the basic sustenance of life, but must do so in the pain of her daily exile. She can lament with the cry of the Old Testament: “At the peril of our lives we bring in our sustenance, in the face of the desert heat” (Lam 5:9). She arrives, at first, to draw natural water to quench a natural thirst. After hearing the word of Jesus she will cry out, “Sir, give me this water . . .” (Jn 4:15). Her physical thirst is a sign of her spiritual thirst. As she is led to recognize the divinity of Jesus, it is as if the words of the psalmist become her own: “O God, you are my God—for you I long! For you my body yearns; for you my soul thirsts, like a land parched, lifeless, and without water” (Ps 63:2). On this deep level, she fulfills the words of the psalmist: “In their distress they cried to the LORD, who rescued them in their peril, guided them by a direct path so they reached a city to live in” (Ps 107:6–7). The prophet Isaiah foretold as much: “The afflicted and the needy seek water in vain, their tongues are parched with thirst. I, the LORD, will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will open up rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the broad valleys; I will turn the desert into a marshland, and the dry ground into springs of water” (Is 41:17–18). Isaiah repeats his prophecy: “Thus says the LORD . . . See I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? In the desert I make a way, in the wasteland, rivers . . . for I put water in the desert and rivers in the wasteland for my chosen people to drink” (Is 43:16a, 19, 20b).

The woman of Samaria was doing a routine daily task, following her regular pattern of behavior. She may have been bored or daydreaming, when suddenly, in her exile, she meets someone. This someone has an apparently ordinary request: "Give me a drink" (Jn 4:7). Thirst is a regular and predictable experience. Yet, that which has seemed ordinary thus far in the Gospel account has actually had a much deeper meaning. So too does this request of Jesus. He will utter the same request, close to the same noon hour on Good Friday when he calls out from the cross: "I thirst" (Jn 19:28). His true thirst is for salvation through the forgiveness of sins. Her thirst is wrapped up in fear of what others think, about her status, about her past and future. His thirst is about others; hers is about herself. The two thirsts meet. He is about to invite her, in the words of the prophet: "All you who are thirsty, come to the water" (Is 55:1).

It all *seems* ordinary enough, but just beneath the surface extraordinary events are aligning. She comes in her loneliness and pain as he sits down in the deep thirst of his mission; she comes to satisfy her thirst, and he asks her for a drink; he is on his journey and she is in her exile; it is noon, he thirsts, and calls out on his necessary journey. This apparently common series of seemingly chance happenings is actually forming one continuous dramatic event. It is a rehearsal for Good Friday, a walk-through of the mission of salvation.

As we follow the passage, the conversation between Jesus and this anonymous woman continues. After he asks for a drink, she points out in a rather rude and abrupt manner that he does not have a bucket and that the well is deep. She further points out that he is a Jew and she is a Samaritan. She identifies all the obstacles she has in relating to Jesus, all the reasons she cannot believe in him. Her excuses range from the practical to the prejudicial.

Consider again the opening sentence of the Gospel passage, which said it was *necessary* that Jesus pass through Samaria. It was not a geographic necessity; rather it was necessary that Jesus pass through *for this woman* and for her *salvation*. She has been exiled within the daily events of her own life. She has suffered much at the hands of many men. But only *one* man can save her. As the psalmist notes, her natural thirst is a sign of her supernatural longing: “My being thirsts for God, the living God” (Ps 42:3). Jesus extends his mission into her daily routine. He goes where she is. He necessarily passes by the well, the place of chaste spousal love, on his journey. He sits down at that well, with a deliberate stubbornness, as if to say, “Now I will teach her the source of true love . . . I will overflow the meaning of this well.” Love alone holds the secret to the truth about life. It is the mission and the thirst of the Son of God to lead the sinner to the depths of his own mercy and love. The supernatural mission of Jesus is expressed in his natural thirst.

The Samaritan woman represents every sinner in the Church, of all times and places. She meets her Lord at this strategic intersection of the ordinary and the extraordinary, the painful and the routine. He invites her to spousal union with him in chaste love. It is as if he begins to hear her confession.<sup>3</sup>

Our life, too, has a well. It sits right in the midst of our daily routine of ordinary places and common tasks. Our lives might even have a place of exile, where we go to avoid other people and to forget the pain. Nonetheless, pain prompts us. The thirst goes deep, a thirst that exists not only in our throat but throughout our life.<sup>4</sup> If we look carefully and listen closely

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3. See Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord VI*, 120, and *Theo-Drama IV*, 386.

4. See Yves Congar, *The Revelation of God* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 37.

in our exile, avoidance, and forgetfulness, we might see the figure of a man whose timing is perfect, who sits down and still thirsts. He looks up and turns to us with his request: "Give me a drink; I thirst."

## Samaria Is Not So Far Away

The car door swings shut with a thud. A teenager shoves both hands deep into the front pocket of his hooded sweat-shirt. He turns and strides slowly across the parking lot while the church spire stretches high above. Two more thuds follow in quick succession as his younger sister and father exit the car. They follow the teen's swaying path. The distance between them speaks volumes as they make their way across the asphalt. They climb the steps in the ritual Sunday morning trek to the church door. They have just finished the all-too-familiar pre-Mass argument about "going" or "not going" to church. The father's ultimatums filled the air in response to his son's complaints. After the grimly quiet car ride, they embark on this forced march to church.

Of course they keep secret their yelling and arguing. No one hears it except them. They believe they are the only family that struggles and yells at one another. The father strides the last few steps to the heavy door and wonders how things went wrong. *Why do we fight? Why do things have to be so tense? Isn't it enough that I have to work two jobs, and my wife works week-ends to make ends meet? Why can't my family be more like other families who smile and seem so well put-together? The car doors will slam again in less than an hour . . . if we are lucky.*

What keeps this routine shuffle going nearly every week? What keeps them coming back? Is it the long, invisible arm of super-ego that points the way insistently to church? Do they go to church because it has been drilled into them? Does *guilt*

pave the way to the church door? Or do they attend because they would feel left out if others in the neighborhood and at work were religious and they were not? Does *social convention* keep the routine going?

Or do they believe, almost superstitiously, that if they did not go to church, things in their life would get worse? Does *fear* push them along this path to church? And what about us? Do we, perhaps unconsciously, seek out religion as a solution to fix something in our lives? Do we sense we need healing and find something about faith that draws us? The modern sense of faith can easily slip into the belief that faith and religion are about fixing my life or the life of another. Such an understanding of faith can lead the seeker to try *to get something out of* religion. Most often, they seek emotional relief by which they try to maintain an equilibrium of life and navigate through the puzzles of day-to-day existence. Religious people want to be good, yet *good* means different things to different people.

Guilt, habit, fear, pain, self-improvement—curiously enough, the reasons some people attend church are the *same reasons* other people give for not going to church. The woman of Samaria is very familiar with guilt, habits, fear, and pain. She is familiar with our excuses because she has tried them all.

The reasons do deepen, of course. What are our reasons for attending Mass? Perhaps we want to set a good example for our children. Perhaps we have noticed we feel more calm and even more centered, if only for a short while, after Mass. Perhaps in church, we feel closer to obtaining something that seems missing in our lives. We come because we live the good example of our parents, or because we have made a long search and know intuitively that this is where we are meant to be. Perhaps the prayers of our parents have escorted us in, or the intercession of a saint. And, possibly, beneath all the seemingly

superficial, mixed motives, we hear a distant echo of “something more” just behind the door.

The questions about practice of the faith all have to do with Catholic identity. What does our Catholic identity mean to us? Is it that we all do the same thing? Or that we make the same gestures, believe the same basics, or live in the same parish? Why do we attend Mass on Sunday? How do we maintain our Catholic identity through the week? Yet, we also are aware of the painful parts of our history. Catholic identity is a rallying point for some, while others seek to dismiss it as a diagnosis. As we examine our Catholic identity, we cannot simply rely on ourselves or the opinions of others. We must turn to the Holy Spirit. He acts in us in a way similar to that of a chiropractor who adjusts a person’s spine. The Holy Spirit assesses the broad range of our Catholic posture and applies pressure and relief at various places in various degrees, realigning the familiar patterns we have adopted.

Today, so many of us are like the Samaritan woman. She came to draw water from the well. We also come to draw water from our faith lives. In the midst of our daily activities we maintain a general belief in God. We have participated in a more or less steady manner in religious ceremonies. Yet, so often, we regard religion as simply a private ceremonial event with no immediate relation to our lives during the rest of the week. Religion has become compartmentalized. We have drifted into understanding faith as a purely private matter.

As in the passage of the Samaritan woman, Jesus emerges during the hardest part, in the intense and oppressive heat of our lives. Yet sometimes we miss him. We may have passed him by dozens of times, or ignored him, or been drawn in another direction by failure, self-pity, drugs, alcohol, or indifference. Yet, Jesus waits. And one day he looks up and asks us for a drink.