

A reading from the homilies of St Augustine on St John's Gospel.

*There came a woman of Samaria to draw water*

“There came a woman.” She symbolizes the Church which was not yet justified, but was about to be justified; for this the effect of the conversation. She comes in ignorance, she finds him, and he converses with her. We must see what this woman of Samaria was and why she had come to draw water. The Samaritans did not belong to the Jewish nation, but were foreigners. It is part of the symbolism that this woman, who is a type of the Church, came from a foreign nation, because the Church was to come from the Gentiles and so be of a different race from the Jews.

We must listen to ourselves speaking in her. We must recognize ourselves in her person; and in her person we must thank God for ourselves. She was not the reality, but its symbol; and because she provided a symbol, she became the reality too. For she came to believe in Jesus who was putting her before us as a symbol. “She came to draw some water.” Quite simply she had come to draw water, as any man or woman is accustomed to do.

Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

You see that they were foreigners. Indeed the Jews would not use their vessels. As the woman brought her bucket to draw some water, she was surprised that a Jew was quite uncharacteristically requesting a drink from her. Although Jesus asked for a drink, his real thirst was for this woman's faith.

Finally, we hear who it is who requests a drink. Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

He asks her for a drink, and promises to give her a drink. He is in need as one who will accept, he abounds, as one who will satisfy. “If you knew,” he said, “the gift of God.” God's gift is the Holy Spirit. But he still speaks to her in a veiled language, and gradually he enters into her heart. Perhaps he

is already teaching her. For what appeal could be more delightful or more kindly made? "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' perhaps it is you who would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

The water which he was about to give to her is surely the water referred to in the words, "With you is the fountain of life." It is impossible for those who "shall be drunk from the abundance of your house" to be thirsty ever again.

Jesus was promising her plentiful nourishment and the abundant fullness of the Holy Spirit. As yet the woman did not understand. How did she answer in her lack of understanding? The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst nor come here to draw." Need drove her to this labor, while her frailty recoiled from it. How wonderful if she heard the invitation, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

That was what Jesus' words to her meant -- an end to her labor; but she did not yet understand their meaning'.