

Two weeks ago, those of you who will be baptised at Easter went to St Mary's Cathedral for the Rite of Election. Those of us who were here, were praying for you. The Rite of Election signalled not only that we could all recognise you as affirmed by the church in your call to baptism, but more importantly, that God had called you, God has chosen you. You are responding to a call from God. That call has come to each of you in different ways. Today, you take another step on the way to your baptism at Easter. Today, we have the Rite of Scrutiny. And again, we all pray for you and support you. The readings we just heard give us spiritual nourishment for participating in the Rite of Scrutiny.

As I was listening to the Gospel, I thought that it could be so easy for each of us – whether Elect or already baptised – to insert ourselves into the story. Any of us could be that Samaritan woman having a conversation with Jesus beside a well while lowering a bucket to draw water. The conversation is about water, and about being thirsty, and about the water that gives life to every living thing. Jesus begins by asking the woman for some water to drink. The woman is surprised that he is even speaking to her. But Jesus likes a conversation, and as he listens to her, he slowly helps her to realise the deepest desires of her own heart. It begins as he promises to give her water that will turn into a spring inside her. This is living water that secures life. You are never again thirsty if this water dwells in you. The woman says directly to Jesus, “give me some of this water”. But as the conversation goes on, it is clear that Jesus is no longer simply talking about quenching her thirst; he is offering her security. He is talking about something that will make her happy; something that will make her life worthwhile and meaningful.

The conversation goes deeper when they begin to talk about her past and the burdens she carries. What is surprising to me is that this conversation did not seem to be difficult for the woman as she acknowledged to Jesus that she had had five husbands. Perhaps it was because Jesus never accused her or made her feel weak. Yes, she changed as was clear when she went back to her village and spoke to people there. But the change was a liberation for her. I think her motivation for change was the very fact that she met Jesus, and he gave her the promise of new life.

Over the course of the conversation we heard in the gospel, the woman was on an incredible journey. She met a stranger who spoke to her. As she listened, she began to think he might be a prophet. She later went to her own people and wondered if the man she met might be the Messiah. By the end, she and her fellow villagers knew that he was the Saviour of the world.

The Rite of Scrutiny will assist you, our Elect, to hear God's word, which is like a spring of water welling up in you. It is another moment to recognise the desires of your own heart for happiness, and to see Jesus as the way to happiness. It is good to call to mind the ways in which encountering Jesus has already transformed your life. The Scrutiny is a time to recognise that in seeking baptism you are seeking a new way of life as a Christian, a follower of Jesus. The Scrutiny will also help you to recognise anything that weighs you down or troubles you or holds you back from living the Christian life. With God's help and with all our prayers, these things can be turned around. The Scrutiny will strengthen you to continue on the path towards Easter and baptism.

Those of us who are already baptised accompany our Elect on their way to baptism at Easter. As we accompany them, we are also preparing to renew the promises we made at our own baptism. Today's gospel invites us deeper into conversation with Jesus at the well. He will keep revealing himself as the one who quenches our thirst. Through that conversation we can each be grateful for the graces and blessings God has given us. The more we recognise God's goodness in our lives, the more we also become aware of the things that hinder our relationship with God. This is why we are on the Lenten journey towards Easter. Let's persevere on that journey, encouraging one another.