

13. March 2026
LENTEN SPIRITUAL RETREAT

Day 24:

“Accept God’s guidance with gratitude and bear witness to the Lord”

Today's reading tells of the rebellion of the sons of Israel in the desert of Zin. They had been traveling for almost forty years and were dissatisfied with their circumstances. They grumbled against Moses and Aaron and quarreled with them. They complained about the miserable place of Kadesh, missing grain and figs, pomegranates and wine. They had obviously lost confidence and demanded of their leaders, *“Give us water to drink.”* Moses and Aaron fell down before the Lord and prayed, *“Lord God, hear the cry of this people and open Your treasure chambers to them; a spring of living water, that they may drink their fill and cease their grumbling.”* (Num 20:6 – translated from the Latin Vulgate Bible)

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Take the rod, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water; so you shall bring water out of the rock for them; so you shall give drink to the congregation and their cattle.’ And Moses took the rod from before the Lord, as he commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, ‘Hear now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?’ And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his rod twice; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their cattle.” (Num 20:7–11)

This situation is also known as *Haderwasser* (“water of strife”). On the long journey through the desert under difficult circumstances, trust in God is particularly important. The Lord had always stood by His people in all their needs. But this was often forgotten, and gratitude was probably not deep enough, so that there was discontent and even various forms of rebellion against Moses in the desert.

Looking deeper, however, these are always rebellions against God and His guidance. Although the Lord responded to the desires of those concerned in a wide variety of situations, their discontent was not overcome at its root. Time and again, it was expectations that were seemingly or actually not fulfilled. These became a source of unrest.

This can also serve as a lesson for us on our path of fasting. We can examine whether there is still discontent within us, whether we often expect something that is not

fulfilled, demanding our supposed rights. In fact, at the call of our Lord, we have left everything behind on the path of discipleship—or at least we desire to. Have we not followed the Lord into the “desert” in order no longer to be at home in sensual pleasures, in our own ideas and plans for our lives, but rather in His loving and caring guidance? Are we grateful to Him for this, or do we still complain too much, so that sources of discord still exist within us?

For Moses, this situation had consequences. He did not follow the Lord's instructions exactly, as he was supposed to speak to the rock and not strike it with his staff. Some interpreters of this passage see this as the reason why he was not allowed to enter the Promised Land.

For us, we can take from this that we should pay very close attention to the Lord's instructions and thus testify to our faith in Him.

The Lord, in His great goodness, gave the people water, even though He could not have been pleased with the Israelites' grumbling and Moses' lack of faith.

In today's long Gospel reading (John 4:5–42), we encounter the touching conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, which gently leads her to faith in Him. In this conversation, the Lord does not hide the fact that the Samaritans do not yet worship God in the way that will be and that God desires: “*But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him.*” (v. 23) In this context He tells her that salvation comes from the Jews.

I would like to take this passage out of the text and place it in our spiritual situation today. After Vatican II, in connection with the text *Nostra aetate*, a current within the Church has obviously gained the upper hand that would like to place the various religions on the same level as the Catholic faith. One could even say that this direction—through the previous pontificate as well as the current one—would like to appear as a kind of “secure doctrine.” However, this is by no means the case, for it is covered neither by Holy Scripture nor by the authentic teaching of the Church to date; rather, this path is clearly misguided.

Today's text, on the other hand, points to the right path. Jesus leads the Samaritan woman from her previously ignorant worship of God to the true faith that He gives in His own person. Jesus Himself is the salvation that comes from the Jews. In this way, He teaches us how to deal with people of other religions. They still lack the true

knowledge of God, which is revealed through the Son of God. Thus, they have not yet come to enjoy the living water—namely, the water of God's overflowing grace. Jesus gives us this, as He also conveys to the Samaritan woman.

We must be clear that if we do not show people where to find the water of life, we would be withholding it from the Samaritan woman and from others. We would thus be following erroneous ideas and leaving the Samaritan woman in her ignorance.

What does all this mean? They would not receive the living water of Holy Baptism, the unadulterated Word of God, wise instruction from people, gentle guidance to the true faith, and deliverance from error and ignorance.

Who can justify this as a Catholic?

Today's flowers are: To be grateful for God's guidance and to show people where to find the water of life.

Meditation on the day's reading: <https://en.elijamission.net/2024/07/13/>

Meditation on the day's Gospel: <https://en.elijamission.net/2024/11/03/>