

How seriously do you take your spiritual life? Do you expect to encounter God today?

The grumbling of the Israelites during their 40 years in the desert was a common complaint -- Where's God? Even among people who claim to be believers, the cry often arises in our hearts, "God where are you? God, are you here?"

So listen to what Paul has to say: God's love has been poured into our hearts. God is at peace with us, because everything has been made right again in Christ. This is a far cry from "God, are you here?" God is right here -- in our hearts.

Think about the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. It started out as a clash of cultural and religious norms -- why would Jesus (a Jewish man) ask her (a Samaritan woman) for a cup of water? This was not done! However, she kept listening to him, and in their dialogue she kept going deeper and deeper until finally she realized that he is the Messiah! She rushed off to tell people in her village, and they came to see for themselves -- she must have been very convincing! When they met and listened to Jesus, they also accepted him as the Messiah.

Compare that to the disciples, who spend day after day with Jesus. They went into town to get food, and when they come back, did they bring there any townspeople with them? Have they convinced any of the people: "come and listen to this fellow Jesus; he's a great preacher, a real prophet. In fact, he's the Messiah we've been waiting for." No, they just got the food; and now they're worried about the scandal of Jesus talking to a woman in public. They missed what (who!) was right in front of them.

Might that be a dilemma in our own spiritual lives -- that we miss who is right in front of us? If God is everywhere, shouldn't we expect to encounter God everywhere? Shouldn't we expect to keep running into God at school, at work, in our families, and while we're on vacation? Shouldn't we expect to hear God in our prayer? Shouldn't we expect that, when we come to Mass, God will speak to us; after all, we're hearing God's Word proclaimed to us? Shouldn't we expect to leave here, knowing that God has touched us, healed us, forgiven us, spoken to us, loved us right here in this place?

Jesus is frustrated with his disciples because they haven't opened their eyes to see what is right in front of them. Look! Here's the harvest -- the people are ripe for the picking! One conversation with this woman from Sychar and she's got the whole town with her. The disciples who spend every day with Jesus still can't see who's in front of them.

I

It's true that stuff gets in the way. Jesus didn't ignore that -- he pointed out that the woman had several husbands and now wasn't even married to the fellow she was with. When she acknowledged the truth of that, he moved on to other matters.

Throughout the Catholic Church, for the next three weeks of Lent, the Elect who intend to enter the Catholic Church acknowledge the stuff that gets in the way. It's their stuff, and it's our stuff too: faults and weaknesses and sins. God hears them -- and God hears us, too -- when admit our truth, when acknowledge the things that get in our way of seeing God, of knowing God, of encountering God every moment of every day, of not seeing what is right in front of us.

Paul says "We're standing in God's grace." We're immersed in it, surrounded by it, covered by it -- how can we not realize that? So in our prayer, let's ask God to clean up whatever's getting in the way of that.

I think it's the right thing to do if we take your spiritual life seriously, and expect to encounter God today.