

and reveals himself as the Messiah: 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.' It is important to note how the journey to faith took place through conversation, a process of talking and listening.

Then with her faith alive and alight, the woman immediately knows the next step to take. As a new disciple of Jesus Christ, she leaves her water jar and goes to tell her neighbours about him. She does not try to indoctrinate but simply invites them to meet him for themselves, 'Come and see a man who has told me everything I have ever done!' To help a little more, she invites them to wonder, *can he be the Messiah?*' In his *Commentary on the Gospel of John* Thomas Aquinas even regards the Samaritan woman as the "example of a true preacher, not calling people to herself but to Christ."

### Questions to Consider:

- How does the image of discipleship as journey, "following the way" strike you?
- What similarity can you see between yourself and some of the earliest disciples?
- What help is found in the story of the Woman at the Well?
- Several times (Jn 4:11, 12) the woman *challenges* Jesus. Might our Church learn from this, helping people to grow in faith?
- Should the Church allow open dialogue on all matters of faith?
- Do you ever question God about the meaning of your life?
- How might we share faith with those who have drifted away?



## Models of Christian Discipleship

There are many *iconic*, vivid pictures of discipleship scattered through the Gospel story, as we learn how various people responded to Jesus and were formed by his words and his example. Think of people like the strong fisherman, Simon Peter, whose loyalty made him say at a moment of crisis, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!" (Jn 6:68); or of the kind and hospitable sisters, Martha and Mary of Bethany, who so often welcomed Jesus into their home (Lk 10:38); or of the Roman centurion who had more faith in Jesus than any of his Jewish followers (Lk 7 : 9); or of the group of pious women, including Mary Magdalene, who provided for Jesus and the apostles out of their resources (Luke 8:2).



"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him.

Thinking about how those first Christians responded to Jesus we can learn many a lesson about how to be his disciples today. We remember the loyal and hopeful trust shown by Elizabeth and Zachary as they hoped for a child in the long years before they were finally gifted with John the Baptist (Lk 1: 57); or the same patient faith of old Simeon and Anna, who waited all their lives for God to send consolation to His people (Lk 2 : 25 ff ).

Their growth in faith did not come all-at-once, at the joyful moment when God fulfilled their hopes; it was nourished and sustained by a prayerful, trusting spirit, day by day and year by year.

Imagine the faith-journey of Our Lady, from her childhood in Nazareth, the only child of devout and elderly parents, Joachim and Anne. From them and other members of her extended family and guided by the Holy Spirit, she learned that deep and wonderful spirituality that we find in the Annunciation (Lk 1:38) and in the Visitation (Lk 1:39ff), and expressed in that song of joyful praise that we call the Magnificat (Lk 1: 46).



Holy Family

When Jesus was born she wrapped him warmly and laid him in a manger (Lk 2:7). Then as she noted the responses of shepherds, magi, old Simeon and others, she “pondered all these things in her heart” (Lk 2:19, 51). Her journey with Jesus led her to Egypt (Mt 2:19ff), to Nazareth (Lk 2:52), to Cana (Jn 2:1-10) – and finally to Calvary, where she stood by the Cross of Jesus to hear his final words (Jn 19:25ff). What a blessing it is to us to read that on the day of Pentecost she was there at the heart of the community of disciples, when the Holy Spirit ignited the fire of faith in our Church (Acts 1:14).

In this year of faith, it is important to realise that faith is an inner journey made with the heart and through encounter with others, rather than the result of a spectacular miracle. There is a splendid example in St. John’s Gospel of how a woman came to faith by gradual stages, by talking with Jesus, and then went on to powerfully share her faith with others. We do not know her name, so we call her simply the Samaritan Woman. The story is so rich in meaning that it’s worth recalling in detail, as a parable of the *inner* journey of discipleship. It is told in John 4, and we will just mention the main points.

Jesus was passing through Samaria on his way to Galilee. He was tired in the middle of a hot day and sat down to rest beside a well. A woman comes along to draw water with a pitcher, and he asks her for a drink. When she obliges, he starts a conversation with her, which is remarkable for several reasons. The first is that a Jewish man like Jesus should be not fraternising with a lone woman. What is more, she was no ordinary woman but a *Samaritan* and her people were regarded by Jews as aliens and heretics.



And then it turns out that she has had a ‘chequered’ history – she has had no less than five husbands. But if the conversation began because Jesus was thirsty, as it goes on it reveals the woman’s thirst for spiritual guidance, and Our Lord’s thirst to offer her the grace of salvation. He wants to give her “living water” – a lovely image for life in the spirit – and she is more than eager to receive it.

This woman was willing to engage with faith, interested in dialogue, open to learning – and in this sense a model for all Christians, whether women or men. Her journey into faith comes through a process of questions and answers. Jesus responds to her actively searching heart,