

3rd Sunday of Lent (A)  
(Exodus 17:3-7 / John 4:5-42)  
23.03.2014

Dear brothers and sisters,

From this third Sunday of Lent to the fifth, the liturgy proposes to us to engage ourselves on a baptismal itinerary, in communion with those who will be baptised on Easter Vigil. We are invited to read three major pages of John's gospel: today "the Samaritan woman" where Jesus promises us the gift of living **water**, next Sunday "the cure of the man born blind" where Jesus will reveal himself to be the **light** of the world, and in two weeks time "the raising of Lazarus" where Jesus will reveal himself to be the resurrection and the **life**. **Water, light and life** are symbols of baptism, the sacrament that immersed us in the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ, liberating us from the slavery of sin, and giving us eternal life. These baptismal catecheses, ideal for catechumens walking toward baptism, are also very useful for us who day after day are trying to live according to our baptismal promises. They help renew us.

Today let us focus on the meeting of Jesus with the Samaritan woman. Three words will guide our meditation: Dialogue, water and faith.

"**Dialogue**" first. Jesus entered into dialogue with a Samaritan woman. Their dialogue became the mediation through which the Samaritan woman came to believe in Jesus. As the dialogue went on, her faith became deeper and deeper. This example shows us the importance of dialogue in Christian life: Dialogue with Jesus in prayer where he speaks to us through his Word and where we answer him; dialogue also with one another which allows the truth to emerge between us. To clarify this last point, let us take an example. Sometimes we look at someone, judge him and condemn him. But if we enter into dialogue with him, if we begin to speak with him, most of the time we discover aspects of his life which lead us to change the regard we have posed upon him; we become more respectful and positive, more merciful and loving about him. Yes, dialogue with one another allows the truth to emerge. We know that Jesus is the Truth and so, when truth emerges, Jesus is not far away from us. If we hesitate or even refuse to enter into dialogue with others, it is because dialogue requires that we go out from ourselves, it necessitates that we forget about ourselves at least for a while, in order to welcome the other and take him on board. And that is demanding! We are afraid of being obliged to change (but to live is to change, is it not?); but we prefer the status quo which, most of the time alas, is a way which leads to death. Dialogue is the only way for the truth to emerge and for life and love to circulate among us.

It is also interesting to note that Jesus is not afraid to speak publicly to a woman, and not only a woman but a Samaritan woman, and we know that Jews did not enter into relationship with Samaritans. Moreover, this Samaritan woman was a well-known sinner. But is it not true that Jesus came into the world not for the just but for the sinners so that they may have life. Let us dream an instant! If Jesus was coming back among us today, would he speak to women, to gay people, to couples in second unions, to unbelievers and to foreigners? There is no doubt whatsoever that Jesus would do this and that He would have for each one of these people a life-

giving word, a word of mercy and a regard of love. This is exactly what Pope Francis is doing and inviting all of us to do, as he exhorts us to live in accord with our baptismal promises.

This dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman takes place at Jacob's well. With the well comes the theme of **water**. What happens at that well? Jesus takes the initiative by asking the Samaritan woman for some water, in order to be able to give her living water later on. By the way, let us note that Jesus asks that woman to render him a service in order to enter into dialogue with her. This is a good example showing us what to do when we want to enter into dialogue with someone where the situation is difficult and we don't know where or how to begin. A good "trick", as they say in Belfast, is to start by asking the other for something they can perhaps offer us.

What is the living water that Jesus wants to give to the Samaritan woman: "The water that I shall give will turn into a spring inside you, welling up to eternal life". In chapter seven of John's gospel, we read that "Jesus stood and cried out: 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me! Let anyone who believes in me come and drink' As Scripture says: 'From his heart shall flow streams of living water.' He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in Him were to receive." Yes, this living water is the gift of the Holy Spirit that we have received on the day of our baptism: the Spirit of sonship, the Spirit of prayer and discernment. We don't know how to pray, but dwelling within us is the Spirit of Jesus who does not cease to pray a prayer pleasing to the Father. If we desire to pray, we have to enter into ourselves, to be with ourselves deep down, searching for and meeting with the Holy Spirit praying within us; we have to make his prayer our own. Since our baptism, we have a spring of living water within us. It is up to us to capture it and use it. We are called to the source of continual prayer within us.

To conclude a word about **faith**. The dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman set alight in her living faith in Jesus. Step by step, her faith became more explicit. Progressively, she recognized in Jesus, a man, a Jew, a prophet, the Messiah, the Christ and finally the Saviour of the world.

In the same way, our faith in Jesus must develop thanks to a continual dialogue with Him, a dialogue nourished by the word of God which refrains us from reducing the dialogue of prayer to a monologue in which we ask the questions and give the answers. Christ becomes more and more important for us until we arrive at the point where we welcome him as our Saviour, because we have discovered through experience that we cannot save ourselves. Christ saves us from sin by forgiving us. Christ saves us from death by promising us a share in his own resurrection.

Little by little, a **dialogue** with Christ and with one another, guided by the **Holy Spirit**, increases and strengthens our **faith** in Jesus Saviour. May this message guide our Lenten meditation during the coming week!