

3rd Sunday of Lent (A)
(Exodus 17:3-7 / John 4:5-42)
15.03.2020

Dear brothers and sisters,

As we continue our Lenten pilgrimage, the liturgy invites us to journey with a Samaritan woman who meets with Jesus beside a well in the heat of the mid-day sun. They enter into conversation with one another.

What do we learn about this woman? During their dialogue, Jesus said to her: “Go and call your husband... The woman answered: ‘I have no husband’. Jesus said to her: you are right to say: ‘I have no husband’; for although you have had five, the one you have now is not your husband. You spoke the truth there”. Let us be careful! These verses are not words of judgment or of condemnation. The point of these verses is not to underline the immorality of the woman. Actually these verses offer us a description of a woman who seeks and does not find what she is searching for. During her lifetime, up until this point, this Samaritan woman was seeking for love, happiness and faithfulness, and not finding them. She was seeking to live to the full and build up a stable family and not succeeding. Her story represents the existential dissatisfaction of so many of us who don’t find what we seek, what we desire, what we aspire to.

All the while, during all this period of her life, this woman has been going to and from the well to draw water. This is an expression of a repetitive and resigned life. Her life is stuck in a rut. She is depressed. Her way of coping with her depression is to live a life of daily routine: To do the same thing each day at the same hour, to come and get water, in order to fulfil her physical thirst, image of a deeper thirst.

Day after day, she comes, depressed, to the well until the day when she meets with Jesus and enters into conversation with him, a conversation which will change everything in her life for the better.

It happens that our lives like that of the Samaritan woman get stuck in a rut every so often. A lot depends on who we are and what is happening to us. Like her, we can be looking for love, happiness and fullness of life and not finding them. Like her we can get into a routine of emptiness finding this to be the only way to cope with our depression or our acedia.

If we want to find happiness and fullness of life, if we want to satisfy our deep existential thirst, we have to enter into dialogue with others.

First of all, we have to enter into conversation with Jesus. We have to listen to Him as He speaks to us through his Word – in the Sacred Scriptures. Little by little, the Lord, through his Word, will help us to find a meaning to our lives. He will show us the way which leads to life and the way which leads to death; He will help us discern what is leading us nowhere. He will teach us how to choose the path to life. He will show us where to go, what to do and how to do this properly; He will show us the way to quench our thirst. Little by little, Jesus, through his word, will lead us toward a greater understanding of who He is.

If we come back to today's gospel passage, we see how the woman discovers progressively who Jesus is: 'a Jew' whom she calls 'sir'. Then she recognises in him 'a prophet', 'the Messiah' and finally 'the Saviour of the world'. If we listen to the Lord and open our hearts and minds to Him, we shall discover that the Lord is the source of the happiness we long for, the fulfilment of our legitimate desires and thirsts, the true answer to our existential questions about life, love, justice, suffering, death, etc...

If we want to find happiness and fullness of life we have to enter into relationship not only with the Lord Jesus but also with others. Sometimes we meet with great difficulties and face thorny issues. We don't know how to come to terms with them. There is no other solution than to enter into relationship, into conversation with all those who are concerned. In this dialogue, it is very likely that a solution we could not find alone will emerge with others. Let us not forget that Jesus is the Word of God made flesh, 'The Word'! So, words matter! The exchange of words and true dialogue with Jesus in prayer, and the exchange of words and true dialogue with others are reliable means by which true meaning comes into our lives.

Sometimes, we don't know how to engage in a difficult dialogue; we don't know how or where to begin. Jesus gives us a precious example in this story. Jesus is seated beside the well, tired by his journey and thirsty. He, a man, is alone with that unknown woman who moreover is a Samaritan, and we know that Jews and Samaritans didn't relate with one another. Suddenly Jesus has the idea of asking help from this Samaritan woman: 'Give me a drink'... and a dialogue opens up.

There is a precious lesson for us here. When we have to enter into a difficult dialogue with someone and we don't know how or where to begin, perhaps we might ask that person to help us in one of our basic needs. We are likely to find that suddenly defences fall and life will circulate between us.

The message of today's gospel is an invitation to enter into dialogue with the Lord and with one another. Through dialogue, our lives will change for the better. During this Lenten season, let us take time to listen and speak to the Lord, enjoying his presence. Let us take time to listen and speak to one another. When we do so, then, like the Samaritan woman, we shall experience a new birth, a new beginning. From being depressed, we shall become fully alive and equipped to become apostles of the gospel.