

3rd Sunday of Lent (A)
(Exodus 17:3-7 / John 4:4-52)
12.03.2023

Dear brothers and sisters,

We have just heard the dialogue or – to use a word more in vogue today – **the conversation** between Jesus and a Samaritan woman. This Samaritan woman is a typical example of someone unsatisfied by life; her life has been marked by sadness and rejection; she has not found what she was looking for; finally she has resigned herself just to get through life following a kind of meaningless daily routine. This is her way of survival: Every day, at about the sixth hour, a time when there is nobody about, she goes at the well to draw water.

Does it not happen that we experience the same sort of deep dissatisfaction, at least at certain moments during our lifetime?

The encounter and the conversation of this Samaritan woman with Jesus changed her life for the better.

As Jesus speaks with her, he reveals that he is aware of her marital status and track record: she has had five husbands and lives now with a partner. At this point, Jesus speaks to her of the dawning new age when true worship will no longer be celebrated on the Samaritan holy mountain – Mount Gerizim – or in Jerusalem. Jesus himself will be the Temple, the focus of worship in spirit and truth.

As Jesus speaks the faith of the Samaritan woman increases; it deepens. For her, to begin with, Jesus was a Jew, like any other; but then she is led to give him another status, as the conversation progresses. At one point she addresses him more respectfully, she calls him: Sir. In this way she signifies that she recognizes in Him a prophet and finally the Messiah.

The conversation between Jesus and this Samaritan woman reminds us how important it is for each of us, here and now, not to be afraid or shy away from or to be too lazy to enter into dialogue with one another. It is true that dialogue is time consuming. It is true that we can be afraid of the unknown reaction of the other with whom we begin to speak. But the fact is that often true dialogue brings light into our lives. An honest conversation reduces our stress, unties our knots, brings solutions to our problems, opens up for us a way forward, engages us on a life-giving, life enhancing way.

We are invited to enter into dialogue not only with one another, but also with God. Dialogue with God has for name prayer. Prayer is a conversation wherein we listen to God, mainly through a prayerful reading of the Sacred Scriptures. It is the means whereby we speak to God, heart to heart, sharing with him our worries and the joys of our lives. Prayer introduces God into our existence. Prayer brings God's help and his light into our lives.

In the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, **water** holds a special place. In his gospel account, St John likes to use words with a double level of meaning. A word employed by

Jesus is taken by his interlocutor at its first superficial level; Jesus then goes on to draw out its deeper meaning. In his conversation with the Samaritan woman, when Jesus uses the word – water –, he is not speaking about natural water or spring water, as the Samaritan woman thought, even if spring water was something which was precious in Palestine where, during the long months of draught, people depended on cisterns which had stored up the previous winter's rains. When Jesus speaks of water, he means the life-giving water that is a gift of God. This gift of God is the Spirit. We remember Jesus crying out: "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me! Let anyone who believes in me come and drink! He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive" (Jn 7:37-39). Another name of this gift of God is 'the love of God' which has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

The Samaritan woman understanding stops at natural water to begin with, but Jesus leads her to grasp that he is referring to his divine revelation and to the Holy Spirit who will be given as living water to those who accept his divine revelation.

The Christian community understood this living water in a sacramental context, the water of baptism which initiates its adherents into Jesus' life and teaching and confers upon them the gift of the Holy Spirit. We find here the reason of the choice of this gospel passage for the third Sunday of Lent. We are invited to read it to prepare ourselves to celebrate Easter, which is the moment par excellence for baptism. The gospel text of the Samaritan woman is a baptismal catechesis.

Lent is a time of purification and inner healing for those who prepare to be baptised at Easter, that is to say plunged in the fountain of living water. For us who are already baptised, Lent is the favourable time to start turning back to the fount of living water because we also need healing. Lent is the favourable time for us to turn back to the Spirit of Jesus who is within our hearts and does not cease to pray to the Father murmuring Abba-Father. We are invited to make the prayer of the spirit of Jesus within us our own, murmuring Abba-Father, following the rhythm of our breathing.

It happens that our hearts are a bit like a well that little by little has been filled with debris. The water continues to flow deep down but it is inaccessible. There can be so much rubbish cluttering our hearts or so much noise of inner traffic in our head that we don't hear and cannot discern the spirit praying within us. This Lenten season is a favourable time to go back into our hearts and resume our conversation with God in prayer: "Lord, you are present to me, you are present in me, I am present to you. You love me, I love you. You are waiting for me, I am searching for you. I listen to you and want to do your will". The Lenten season also provides us with an opportunity to enter into conversation with those with whom relationships are strained and have become difficult. If we do so, no doubt life will change for both parties for the better.