

Third Sunday of Lent A/2008

Suppose that in the middle of a very hot summer there is a serious breakdown of the hydrologic installations system to the point that there is no water throughout the whole city of Loveland. I presume that such a situation can be tolerated for a short time, that is, perhaps three or four hours, even five or six hours, if people are patient. But if the situation lasts for days or weeks, I suppose what comes at the end will be a pure revolt which can lead sometimes to the fall of the city counsel.

It is a similar situation Israel went through in the desert, as we heard in the first reading. The desert by definition is a very dry land, windy, sunny and hot. Without water, there is no possibility of life. Someone can survive a few days without water, but death is looming on the horizon. In their thirst for water, the Israelites grumbled against Moses; they also doubted about God who generously saved them from the hands of Pharaoh. They accused him not only of abandoning them, but also of wanting them to die in the desert with their children and their livestock.

One would say that the suffering of the moment blinds them and lets them forget the bounty of God. And yet, God is always present among them; he has not abandoned them and will never forsake them. That is why he intervenes again, through the hands of Moses, to reassure them and to give them water.

By acting in such a way with Israel, God wants to teach us that in whatever situation we might find ourselves, as hard as it might be, he will find a way of pulling us out of it. He can never abandon us; he has his time to intervene and put an end to our misery and suffering. What he wants is that we trust him and persevere.

The physical thirst that has been at the origin of Israel's revolt, Jesus will utilize in today's Gospel and make it an opportunity for the gift of eternal life. In order to receive that eternal life, the first step is to welcome Jesus who appears, at first glance, like any human being, but who is, indeed, a prophet and the Messiah. Every encounter, however, requires that the barriers that separate people might be broken, and the established prejudices might be eradicated. That is why, while the Samaritan claims that there is no relationship with the Jews, Jesus invites her to transcend that barrier and to receive the gift he brings.

It is only when we break the barriers and destroy the prejudices we have for one another that we can be able to know each other better. It is only at the moment we honestly overcome our differences that we can discover the other in his depth, discover our own poverty and how the other is someone who can enrich us. By destroying the barriers and prejudices between one another, people can learn from others what they do not know on their own.

By accepting to dialogue with Jesus, the Samaritan discovers what she has sought for many years through different husbands, that is, the peace of heart. Jesus can gratuitously give her, and without condition, the tranquility of heart that she never found in changing husbands over the years. Of course, this woman

knows well what disappointment in love means! She is still hoping to meet the right man who can fulfill her deepest needs. And now she is facing a man who is not just another man, but a prophet, the Messiah. Although Jesus knows everything about her, he does not condemn her. He wants only for her to be in peace and to reconcile with her God. That is what Jesus wants also for each one of us, particularly in this time of Lent.

Jesus gives living water that becomes a spring of water welling up to eternal life to those who welcome him and accept his teaching. He is in search of true worshipers of his Father, that is, those who adore and worship God in Spirit and truth. How can we worship God if we do not face the truth about ourselves? However, whatever might be the truth of our life, whatever might have been our past, there is no reason to be ashamed about it. Nobody is excluded before Jesus. He loves us and wants us to be saved. The encounter with Jesus can even change the course of our life. That is what happened to the Samaritan in her journey: At the end, she became the messenger of Jesus in the village.

Because this is the time of worshiping the Father in spirit and in truth, the external cult of God does not suffice anymore. Of course, salvation comes from the Jews, but now is the time of the interior worship that transcends all these divisions, where we have to become ourselves these temples of worship of God.

Jesus sits at our wells, waiting for us when we come to draw water; that is, at the places where we are the most vulnerable or the weakest. He understands our thirsts, but he wants to fulfill them with his healing love. There, even a failure in marriage can become an opportunity to experience God's mercy and bounty.

The Samaritan symbolizes the dark side of our lives, all that we have as secrets we bury in the depth of our hearts, all from our past that we are ashamed of, that nobody knows except God. In all those troubled situations, Jesus can heal and win us back the freedom of God's children. The living water that Jesus promises means, first of all, the word of revelation that opens us to the love of the Father. The wellspring of water that quenches our thirst is also the Holy Spirit who has been given to us in baptism, as Saint Paul said in the second reading. God reveals himself to us when we are thirsty for him. God alone can ultimately saturate all our desires. The Holy Spirit quenches by renewing in us the thirst of God. He calms and, at the same time, increases again and again in us the thirst for God.

In this time of Lent, let us yearn for the living water that Jesus gives. Let us bring to him all our desires so that he can satisfy them. Let us yearn for eternal life that only Jesus gives. May God bless each one of us as we prepare our hearts for the celebration of the death and the resurrection of Jesus!

Exodus 17, 3-7; Romans 5, 1-2, 5-8; John 4, 5-42



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