

Third Sunday of Lent A/2014

The readings of this third Sunday of Lent talk about water. They show us that God is the one who quenches human thirst and every longing of the human heart. They invite us to long for the living water that gives eternal life and which only God can give.

The first reading of Exodus describes the experience of the Israelites in the desert. It relates in particular how they grumbled against God and his servant Moses when they were overwhelmed with thirst in the desert. It shows also what God did in order to provide for their need by giving them water from the rock. Finally, the text describes the way Moses came to give them water according to the recommendations he received from God.

What is behind this text is the idea that the experience of suffering is paradoxical and blinding. It can lead people to doubt of the bounty even of those who have always been good to them. Another idea is the affirmation of the kindness of God who responds to human needs with generosity and liberality. The last idea is relative to the power of God who is capable of making the impossible possible by providing for human needs.

This text helps us understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob. In fact, the Gospel starts with the trip of Jesus to the town of Samaria. It shows how he was tired and went at noon to the well of the village in hope of having some water to drink.

Then, the Gospel relates the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman who came to the well to draw water. It shows how Jesus asked her for water to drink and how the woman was astonished to be addressed by a Jew with whom Samaritans have so difficult relationship.

After that, the Gospel describes the conversation between them by showing Jesus' invitation to the Samaritan woman to open up to God's gift of living water. It describes also the misunderstanding of the Samaritan about the whole of Jesus' speech and the insistence of Jesus about the water he offers which gives eternal life.

After that, the Gospel shows that, as the woman was still reluctant, Jesus ended up by asking her to bring back her husband and, in a gesture of sincerity, the woman confessed the whole truth regarding her life. After the disclosure of her life, she alerted the whole town that came to Jesus and believed in him, recognized him, thereby, as the Messiah.

Finally, the Gospel describes the return of the disciples who went in the town looking for food and the confession of Jesus that his food is to do the will of his Father and to finish his work of salvation.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the healing of the human heart. In fact, the human heart is the dwelling of our deepest feelings like happiness, joy, sadness, fear, expectations, etc. What brings peace to the human heart is when our longings and needs are satisfied. As long as our needs are not met, we will never be at rest with ourselves, because something is missing that can make us happy. That is why many people who are unsatisfied lack peace and long very often for what can satisfy their hunger and thirst of things they desire in their heart.

However, one thing is to feel legitimate hunger and thirst for things we do not have, and another is to be mistaken about what can really satisfy us. The Samaritan woman who came to the well was certainly in search for water, but beyond the physical water, something was missing in her life that could give her peace.

The fact that she was living with a man who was not her husband, and even had five others before, was a sign that her heart was broken and she was never satisfied in her needs. In spite of changing different husbands over the years, she never found what she was looking for and which could give her the tranquility of heart. In truth, she was wounded by the hardships of life and in need of healing.

That is why her meeting with Jesus was an opportunity to be healed of her ghosts and to have peace. In fact, Jesus did not humiliate her because she was living in sin. Though he knew everything about her life, he did not condemn her. He wanted only for her to be in peace and to reconcile with God. That is also what Jesus wants for each one of us in this time of Lent. He does not condemn us or judge us. He gives us an opportunity of reconciliation with God, whatever might be our sins. The problem is always if we are open to this grace of healing or not, if we accept it or reject it.

The process of healing, in fact, starts with the willingness of welcoming Jesus into our life. As long as we keep Jesus outside of our life, we will not be healed of our ghosts. We might run after many things like money, sex, power, but none of those things will give us peace. We will be like a bottle that has a hole, but will never be full, whatever might be the quantity of water someone can put in.

The second step that leads to healing is the destruction of human barriers. As long as we dwell in our barriers and prejudices, we cannot receive God's gifts. In the same way, we can know each other better only when we drop our prejudices. Only the effort to overcome our differences helps us discover our poverty and the riches the other can bring in our life. That is what the Samaritan has done in her encounter with Jesus.

In spite of difficult relationships her own people had with the Jews, she opened the door of her heart to Jesus. Because she did so, Jesus could in turn open his heart to her. That is why he could reveal to her that he was the Messiah she was waiting for. Then, she could learn that the true worshipers the Father is looking for are those who worship him in Spirit and in truth.

The last step in the process of healing is believing in God. That is where the Samaritan woman and the people of her town ended up. They eventually believed in Jesus as the savior of the world. In other words, the whole process of healing has just one goal, namely to understand that without Jesus we are lost and only he can save us.

Let us pray, then, asking Jesus to give us living water. Let us offer to him all our deepest desires and needs so that he can satisfy them. May God bless you all!

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



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