

### **Third Sunday of Lent A/2017**

The readings of this third Sunday of Lent talk about the importance of water. They show 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.

The first reading of Exodus describes the dire experience of the Israelites in the desert. It highlights their grumbling against Moses as they were overwhelmed with thirst in the desert. It also shows how, through the hands of Moses, God in his generosity and bounty provided them with water from the rock. Finally, the text describes the way Moses came to give them water according to the recommendations received from God.

What is behind this text is the idea that the experience of suffering is paradoxical because it can lead people to doubt of the bounty even of those who have always been good and generous to them. Another idea is the affirmation of the kindness of God who responds to human needs with bounty and liberality. The last idea is relative to the truth that for God nothing is impossible.

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 refers to their exchange by showing Jesus' invitation to her 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, how she 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 and recognized him as the Messiah. Finally, the Gospel describes the return of the disciples who were 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 spiritual healing of the heart. What do I mean by that? Let me explain. First of all, let me start with the story of my visit to the well of Jacob in Samaria, place of the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman, and tell you how I was overwhelmed to have put my feet on such a healing ground.

In fact, there are two types of diseases, the disease of the body and the disease of the soul. While the physical disease has to do with the physiology of our body, the spiritual disease is rooted deep in us, in a place that a human diagnosis cannot determine. The physicians can deal only with our physical body and not with our spiritual sickness. So, though we might be physically healthy, nonetheless we might be spiritually sick. The Samaritan woman who came to the well was in that category of people. She was

certainly in search for water, but beyond the physical water, something was missing in her life that would have given 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 not only her heart was broken, but also her love and her life. And I believe that the damaged lives we see when love goes wrong reminds us, as Pope Francis said it, why the Church is a field hospital that should offer healing.

There is more: in spite of changing different husbands over the years, she never found what she was looking for and which would have given her the tranquility of heart. In truth, her heart was wounded by the hardships of life and she was in need of healing.

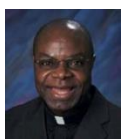
That is why her encounter with Jesus was an opportunity to be healed of her ghosts and to have peace. In fact, Jesus did not humiliate her because she was living in sin. Though Jesus knew everything about her life, he did not condemn her. He wanted only for her to be healed and to reconcile with God. That is also what Jesus wants for each one of us in this time of Lent, namely to be healed of our spiritual sickness. He does not condemn us or judge us. He gives us an opportunity of reconciliation with his Father, 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 spiritual healing, in fact, starts with the willingness of welcoming Jesus into our life and leaving the sins behind. 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 sex or money or power, but none of those things will give us peace. We will be like a bottle that has a hole. Whatever might be the quantity of water someone tries to pour in, it will never be full.

The second step that leads to the spiritual healing is the destruction of human barriers. As long as we build barriers and dwell in prejudices, we cannot receive God's gifts. Only the effort to overcome our prejudices helps us discover our poverty and the riches the other can bring into our life. That is what the Samaritan has done in encountering 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. Then, he could reveal to her that he was the Messiah she was waiting for. In turn, 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 spiritual healing of the heart is believing in God, which literally means to put our trust 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 spiritual healing has just one goal, namely to lead us to Jesus, because without him we are lost. 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. Let us ask him to heal us of our spiritual ailments! May God bless you all!

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



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