

III LENT– 15th March 2020

A SPRING OF WATER WELLING UP TO ETERNAL LIFE - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

John 4,5-42

So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?" Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth." The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."

Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?"

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?"³⁰ They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something."

But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?"

"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows

and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers.

They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

The fourth chapter of John's gospel contains the episode of the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman, an exclusive episode of this evangelist. The reading is very long, but let's see at least the main aspects. The evangelist sets this meeting in a city of Samaria, Samaria was the region that was at the center, between Judea, the holy region, and the north of Galilee, and it was a region that had been colonized by foreign populations, and therefore the people were mestizo, and for this they were despised. *"..near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there,..."* and terminology that the evangelist uses very accurately here is important, it is not *"..a well.."* but it is *"Jacob's"* source or spring. Then the evangelist will say that Jesus tired from the journey, *"..sat down by the well."* Taking possession of the well. Why is this terminology important? Because the evangelist refers to the lament of God, contained in the prophet Jeremiah chapter 2,13 when the Lord says: *"They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.."* So the evangelist sets Jesus as the true source, which offers the water, the water of the Spirit. John stresses the hour, *"It was about noon.."* and says that there is a Samaritan woman who goes to draw water. It is not possible at that hour, one went to the well either early in the morning, at dawn, or in the evening at sunset, noon is not the right time. Why does the evangelist put the exact time? Because noon is the hour, in this gospel, of the death sentence of Jesus. The evangelist wants to show the fruits of death, of the resurrection of Jesus.

The woman is Samaritan, and, as we will see, she is an adulterous woman, also she is anonymous, and represents the Samaria, and here the evangelist introduces us to Jesus as the groom, who goes to reconquer the adulterous bride, and does not reconquer her through threats, through punishments, but through an offer of even greater love. And in fact Jesus, to this woman, who represents Samaria, tells her: *"If you knew the gift of God..."* she went to draw water, she knows the effort to draw water from the well, and instead Jesus wants to offer her something different, a relationship with God that is no longer based on human effort, on human virtues, but on welcoming his love. Jesus says *"If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."* here is the difference between the source, where there is living water, and the water from the well. And the woman already calls him "Lord", so there is already progress, *"..you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep."* here is the contrast between the source and the well, *"Where can you get this living water?"* Jesus continues *"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,..."* the well, in Jewish is symbolic and represented the divine law, a relationship with God, based on the observance of the law, is always a relationship that leaves man unsatisfied, because he never knows if he has observed enough, if he has made the rules, if he is okay or not with God. Jesus comes to propose a new relationship with the Father, and

says to her: *“but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”* The acceptance, by man, of the love of God, is transformed in the individual into a gushing spring, therefore man must no longer go to procure water with his own effort, that which gives life, but this water is interior, it is the experience of a communicated love and a received love. When the person experiences the feeling of being loved generously, he discovers within himself the strength, the energy of loving generously.

The woman declares herself available to welcome this water, and here Jesus asks her to go and call her husband. She replies that she has no husband and Jesus, and here it is not that Jesus is a moralist, it is something different what the evangelist is presenting to us, he says: *“The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband.”* Jesus refers to the history of Samaria: we said that the Samaritans were a mixed population, they had been colonists imported by the Assyrians, they had mixed with the present population, for which they worshiped the God of Israel on Mount Garizim, but then, on five other mountains or hills they had erected five temples to other deities. Here's who these husbands are, the term husband and lord in the Hebrew and the Aramaic language, are identical. So Jesus, to this woman who declares herself willing to welcome this water, reminds her that however this is not possible if she remains in idolatry.

And the woman replies *“I can see that you are a prophet.”* first she saw him as a Jew, then as the lord, then as a prophet, she is going back to tradition, *“Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, ...”* it is Mount Garizim *“..but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”*(the temple) and here is the important revelation of Jesus: the epoch of the times is over. The God of Jesus is no longer in a temple, where men must go, but man becomes this temple, in which God manifests his holiness.

Jesus replies, *“Woman,”* meaning bride *“believe me”* Jesus referred, with this term, to the mother, now he turns to the Samaritan woman. The mother represents the faithful bride, the one who never lacked the wine of love; the Samaritan woman is the adulterous bride, whom the groom recaptures with an even greater offer of love. *“ Woman, believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.”* She turned to the fathers of the tradition, Jesus speaks of the Father: while God needs a temple and the faithful, the Father needs children, who imitate him in his love. And then Jesus continues: *“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, ...”* spirit and truth indicate faithful love *“..for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.”* literally the evangelist translates: the father looks for such worshipers, *“ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”* The true cult, which Jesus proposes, is not a cult that starts from man towards God, in which man must deprive himself of what he has to offer it to God, but the new cult is that which starts from God towards man , a communication of love that man welcomes, and the new worship that Jesus requires, is the extension of the creative action of the Father. While the ancient cult diminishes man, the new cult strengthens him, on the contrary, the more he manifests this love and the more he makes himself similar to the Father. Therefore to worship in spirit and truth means to collaborate in the creative action of the Father.

Well the woman declares herself once again in harmony, and it is to her, to an adulterous woman, a woman considered impure, who, for the first time, Jesus manifests himself in his divine condition and as the Messiah. *“Jesus says “...I am he.”* I am is the claiming of the divine name.

The conclusion of this long episode is that then the woman, leaving the jug, having understood that this water in the jug is no longer needed, because there is no longer the well where she has to draw water from, but there is this source, which God, through Jesus, offered her within herself, goes to spread the news to the people, and here is the ending, the Samaritans who say to the woman: “*We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is...*” and here is the revelation “*...the Saviour of the world.*” While the Jews waited the saviour, in Israel, the heretics, the mestizos, the impure Samaritans understood the true identity of Jesus, the savior of the world.