

III LENT– 19th MARCH 2017

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

John 4,5-42

And he had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock."

Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

Just then his disciples came back. They marvelled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"

They went out of the town and were coming to him. Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have laboured, and you have entered into their labour." Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two

days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world."

Chapter four of John's gospel contains the episode of the meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, an episode exclusive to this evangelist. The passage is very long, but let's see the principle aspects. The evangelist places this encounter in a city of Samaria. Samaria was the region that was in the centre, between Judea the holy region and north of Galilee, and it was a region that had been colonized by foreign populations, and the people were of mixed race, and for this were despised.

"...near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph Jacob's well was there;" Then the evangelist will say that Jesus was weary from his journey, *"...and was sitting beside the well."* The evangelist refers to the prophet Jeremiah 2, 13 when the Lord says: *"..they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.* So the evangelist sees Jesus as a true spring, that offers water, the water of the Spirit

The evangelist now emphasises the hour, *"It was about the sixth hour."* And says that the woman, that comes to draw water, was a Samaritan. It is not possible at that time, one goes to the well in the early morning, at sunrise, or the evening at sunset. Midday is not the right time. Why does the evangelist give this time? Because midday is the hour, in this gospel, of Jesus' condemn to death. The evangelist wants to show the fruit of death, in the resurrection of Jesus.

The woman is Samaritan, and as we will see, she is an adulterous and anonymous woman that represents Samaria. Here the evangelist shows Jesus as a bridegroom, that goes to conquest the bride adulteress not with threats and punishments, but with offers of a greater love. In fact Jesus says to this woman, that represents Samaria: *"If you knew the gift of God,..."* she comes to draw water, she knows the strength of drawing water from the well, and Jesus wants to offer her something different, a relationship with God that is not based on the human strength or virtue, but on the welcoming of his love.

Jesus says: *"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."* Here is the difference between the spring, where the water is living, and the water of the well. And the woman replies, calling him *"Sir,"* which is already progress, *".. you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep."* - here is the contrast between the spring and the well, *"Where do you get that living water?"* Jesus replies *"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,..."* A relationship with God based on the observance of the laws, the well, in symbolic Hebrew, represented the divine law, always is a relationship that leaves man unsatisfied, because you never know if you have observed enough, followed all the rules and if it is alright or not with God. Jesus comes to propose a new relationship with the Father, and says: *"..but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."* The acceptance of the love of God, on the part of mankind, transforms the individual into a gushing spring, therefore they have no more need to obtain water with their own efforts, but this water is interior, it is the experience of a communicated and received love. When a person has the experience of feeling loved generously, discovers inside himself a strength and energy to love generously.

The woman is willing and draws this water, and here Jesus asks her to go and call her husband. She replies that she has no husband and Jesus says: *"You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband."* Jesus is referring to the history of the Samaria. As we have said the Samaritans were a mixed race. They were settlers imported by the Assyrians, they had mingled with the present population, so worshiped the God of Israel on Mount Grasim, but then, on five other mountains or hills, they had erected five temples to other deities. These are the husbands, the terms husband and wife in Hebrew, Aramaic, are identical. So Jesus, to this woman who is prepared to accept this water, points out that this is not possible, however, if she stays with idolatry.

And the woman replies: *"Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet."* First she had seen him as a Jew, then had called him "Sir" as a prophet and then she refers to the tradition, *" Our fathers worshiped on this mountain,..."* mount Grasim *".. but you say that in Jerusalem.. "* the place of the temple *"..is the place where people ought to worship."* here is an important revelation of Jesus: the time of the temple is finished. Jesus' God is not in the temple, where the people must go, but man himself becomes this temple, in which God shows his holiness.

"Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me,..." meaning bride. Jesus is referring, with this term, to the mother, now he turns to the Samaritan. The mother represents the faithful bride, the one which never lacked the wine of love; the Samaritan is the adulterous bride, that the bridegroom re-conquers with an offer of an even greater love. "Woman, believe me the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father." She has built herself on the fathers tradition, Jesus speaks of the Father while God needs a temple and the faithful, the Father needs children, who love like him.

And then Jesus continues: "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth," 'spirit and truth' is an expression that means a faithful love "...for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." True worship, that Jesus offers, it is not a cult of man towards God, in which man must be deprived of what he has to offer to God, but the new cult which comes from God to man , a communication of love that man receives, and the new worship that Jesus requires, is an extension of the creative action of the Father. While the old cult diminishes man, the power of the new cult, manifest even more this love like the Father. So worshiping in spirit and truth, means to collaborate in the creative action of the Father.

Well the woman declares once again to understand completely , and it is to her, an adulterous woman, a woman considered unclean that for the first time Jesus shows himself in his divine condition and as the Messiah. Jesus says to her, "I who speak to you am he."

The conclusion of this long episode is that the woman goes to spread the news to the people, leaving the pitcher which she has understood that it does not serve anymore, the well to draw from is no more now there is this spring that God, through Jesus, has offered her. And Samaritans say to her "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves,..." " and here is the revelation "...this is indeed the Saviour of the world." While the Jews expect the saviour of Israel, the heretics, the mixed blood, the unclean Samaritans have understood the true identity of Jesus, the Saviour of the world.