

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

Jn 4.5-42

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. There came a woman of Samaria 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 forever. 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 marveled 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. ³¹ 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 labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

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 Savior of the world."

There are three female personages in John's Gospel, to which Jesus refers to as 'woman', that means 'bride or wife' and represents in some way the brides of God. The relationship between God and his people, through the prophets, in particular from Hosea on, the prophet of the Samaria, was represented as that of a matrimony. God was the groom and the people his bride.

So, in this gospel, Jesus refers to His mother in the wedding at Cana as 'woman', that is 'bride'. The mother represents the people that had been always faithful to God, witnesses of the new covenant that Jesus would come to propose, because in the old covenant there is no wine, meaning the lack of love.

Then Jesus, in the passage that we comment now refers with the same appellation 'woman' or 'wife' to a woman adulteress or wife adulteress, that the groom goes to reconquest not through threats or punishment, but with an offer much greater of love. The last female figure to which Jesus will refer to, calling her 'woman' is Mary Magdalene, that represents the new community, the bride of Lord.

In this passage there is the intention of God, who is Jesus, to recuperate the bride adulteress.

It is the groom that goes to recuperate the bride adulteress. The evangelist presents us an anonymous Samaritan woman. When personages are anonymous it means that they are representatives of a reality that the evangelists wants to present. And Jesus, indifferent to the conflict between the races, religion or sexes, turns to this woman asking for something to drink. It is something that a Judean man would never have done, ask a woman, and even more so a Samaritan woman, an enemy, that was considered impure.

In fact the Samaritan woman is astonished and asks Jesus: "*«How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria? »*", and underlines, a man does not speak to a woman and this is a Samaritan woman. The Samaritans, for their idolatry which we will see now, were considered impure, enemies of God and all men. And the evangelist diplomatically underlines: "*For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans,*" actually every time they met there was a fight.

Well, Jesus had asked minimum sign of friendship, hospitality, to then reply with His gift. And "*Jesus answered her, «If you knew the gift of God »*". The groom goes to reconquer the bride adulteress, not through threats, but with an offer even greater than his love. And Jesus says: " if you knew this gift and he that you are living a drink to, you yourself would have asked for the living water", that is the water from the source".

And here is where the dialogue takes place between two different terms regarding the place of this water. I am sorry that the translators did not take this into account. While the woman spoke of a well. Which means a place where there is water, but not living water and above all, needs the force of man, in the woman's case, to draw the water.

The well is the image of the law and the water is that which gives life. While the woman talks of a well, that is that she does not know of the free gift, Jesus talks to her of the source. In the source the water is alive, the water gushes, and above all needs no force on the part of the woman that is thirsty, if not that but to drink. In fact Jesus replies to her: "*«Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again »*", images of the law. The law is not able to respond to the desire that each man carries inside.

Because for the law man is always limited, inadequate, unfulfilled. But Jesus declares: "*«..whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever»*". His message, his person, is the answer to the desire of fulfillment that each person carries inside. And, adds Jesus: "*«The water that I will give him will become in him....»*", therefore it is not longer an external water, but an internal water

"*«... a spring of water welling up to eternal life.*" The love of God. That through Jesus is communicated to mankind, in the measure in which mankind welcomes it and transmits it to others, in this strength of a love received and of a communicated love, realizes, allows to grow and mature his existence for always. Renders life indestructible.

Therefore it is not an experience of observing the laws external to mankind, but the experience of an internal force, because God does not govern mankind sending laws that they must observe, but communicating to them his own capacity of love. At this point, strangely, Jesus asks the woman to go

and call her husband. The woman's reply is that she has no husband. And Jesus reminds her that she has had five husbands.

What does this mean? We have seen that the woman is anonymous; anonymous personages are representatives, therefore the woman represents Samaria, and what are these five husbands? This region had been populated by colonies coming from other nations, which had brought their divinities. Because of this on the five hills there were five temples to five divinities. Also on Mount Grasim, the temple to Jahvè.

Therefore they worshiped Jahvè, but with the other gods. And, in the Jewish language, 'sir' and 'husband' have the same meaning. The woman understands. She understands that he whom she has called now Sir is a prophet, and recalls the tradition. "*«Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship. »*" She has understood the call of Jesus and is ready to turn to the true God.

Only she wants to know where. There are many sanctuaries, especially that important one of Grasim, where they worship the God of Israel, but there is also that of Jerusalem. So, she is willing to turn to God, but wants to know where. Here is the important novelty that Jesus proclaims to this Samaritan woman, the end of the temple, the end of the cult. "*«Woman, believe me, »*" He turns to her calling her 'woman', 'bride' , "*«...the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father»*."

She is recalled to the fathers, 'our fathers', Jesus invites her to welcome the Father, she thought to go to a place to offer to God, now begins the time in which it is God that offers himself to mankind, he asks to be welcomed to increase their capacity of love and make them able of a generous and unconditioned love like his. Here is an important announcement of Jesus: "*«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. The only cult that God asks is not on the part of mankind towards God ,but from the Father towards mankind. It is the communication of his love that mankind makes his own, it is the only cult that God asks them is the continuation of this love. Spirit and truth means a true love. When is it that love is true? When love is faithful. The evangelist says, "*«Father is seeking such people to worship him. »*"

It is so urgent for the Father to show himself to mankind, that he searches for them to realize his design of love. And here is the splendid expression of Jesus; "*«God is spirit »*". Spirit is not something abstract, but means a vital creating energy. "*«..and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. »*" in faithful love. Therefore God is the creator of energy that asks only to be welcomed by mankind to increase his love for all humanity. This is the novelty brought by Jesus. It is the end of the temple, because there is no more need of the temple, and the end of the cult, that was a diminution of mankind in front of God.

Mankind must do without something to give it to God. In the new cult it is God that offers himself to mankind because with him and like him, one gives oneself to all humanity.