

Reflections

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213 – February 1st, 2019

The Samaritan Woman

Jesus Christ manifests himself as true redeemer and pastor of every human being. He neither excludes nor scorns anybody, but takes advantage of each human encounter to reveal the mystery of the new life. Through all his speaking and acting, the love of Him who did not come to judge but to save can be felt. A beautiful example of that attitude of his is the encounter with the Samaritan woman (JN 4, 5-42). Starting from the concrete situation, Christ exhausts all means to attract and convert this sinner in order to capture her heart.

The living water. The encounter begins in a very common way and, at the same time, very human: tired from the road, hungry and thirsty, Jesus arrives at noon at a well in Samaria. There he finds a woman who wants to draw water and He asks her for a drink.

The woman finds the petition from a Jew, strange, because the Jews hated the Samaritans and considered themselves superior to them. But Jesus is not interested in that rivalry. It is the works and not the origin which justify and dignify. The answer of Jesus shows that his desire to drink was only to serve as a pretext to begin a dialogue. He feels that this woman, at the bottom of her heart, is not only seeking natural water but also water and nourishment for her soul: supernatural and living water.

Gift from God. But man cannot find this water within himself because it is a gift from God, a gift which Jesus gives. But the woman takes the words word for word. She believes it is about natural water and does not understand the symbolism.

Then Jesus gives the dialogue another turn in such a way that she can no longer avoid it: "Call your husband!" And in continuation, He reveals to her that he knows her entire life, her weaknesses, her interior life.

Now the woman begins to understand: This man has to be a prophet in order to know all these things. Thus, the dialogue continues on the religious level: Which is the true religion? What is the true homage (worship) to God?

The Samaritans adored God on Mount Garizin where they had raised a temple to Him. The Jews, on the other hand, assured that true homage (worship) could only be given in Jerusalem. But above all these ritualistic details, Jesus teaches a fundamental truth about the new worship (homage): God is Spirit and the true adorers should adore Him in Spirit. The place and the form of worship matter little.

The true religion is the interior religion, born from the heart. It consists in growing in knowledge and communion with the Father. It consists in purifying the worship (homage), converting all cold and empty formality into a personal attachment to God.

The same goes for liturgical reform. It is worthless if it is not founded and accompanied by an interior renewal. It is not the form or the ritual formulas which brings us to God, but the conversion of the heart.

The dialogue between Jesus and the woman now reaches its culmination and its goal: Jesus manifests himself as the Messiah, awaited for centuries by the Jews and the Samaritans. That revelation, finally, reaches the heart of the woman. Something has broken in her. A great new light arises in her interior.

She leaves her large pitcher and goes – transformed – to the city and begins to announce. She speaks with such bravery about Jesus as a prophet that many Samaritans believe in Christ because of the woman's testimony. As fruitfulness from her encounter with Jesus, she converts from being a sinner into being an apostle.

Also in our own life there are many encounters with Christ. We encounter Him in the Gospel, in our brothers and sisters, in the sacraments and also in the Eucharist. But we are not always open and attentive to his coming. We do not always recognize Him in his different appearances. And few times do we give testimony about Him as the woman in the Gospel.

Therefore, let us ask Christ for the grace to be brave witnesses of Him, of his word and of his infinite love, just like the apostles, or simply like the Samaritan woman.

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