

The Samaritan Woman and the Water of Salvation

Third Sunday of Lent - Ex 17:3-7 / Jn 4:5-15, 19b-26, 39a, 40-42
Ave Maria Catholic Church, March 12, 2023 - Fr. David M Vidal

The immediate context of the passage of the book of Exodus that we heard in our First Reading today is about the long journey of the Jews in the desert. The lack of water was one of the greatest difficulties facing such an overwhelming number of people as they traveled in the desert with their flocks and herds.

When hunger and thirst were felt more severely, the Israelites regretted leaving Egypt and murmured against Moses. God, who in so many ways had shown his special favor for that people, now calls for faith, absolute abandonment in Him, and the overcoming of their own human certainties.

Now, when they can no longer count on their own resources and are exhausted and disheartened, when they see nothing else but bare rock, God intervenes: *"You shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it"* (Ex 17:6).

That event happened for a reason. In God's providence, everything is measured and ordered for a purpose. The image of water springing from the rock announces a greater grace. This is the grace that Saint Paul explains in his first letter to the Corinthians:

"I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same supernatural food, and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ." (See 1 Cor 10:4).

The Rock is Christ, and we receive living water from Him!

What is this living water?

Let us listen to Jesus. Let us learn the meaning of this water in his explanation to the Samaritan woman.

Jesus begins his conversation with a request for some natural water from the well. The Samaritan woman is surprised. The Jews and Samaritans were enemies; why does a Jewish teacher ask a Samaritan woman to draw water for him?

Jesus opens the conversation by presenting the need for natural water, only to elevate the conversation to the revelation of the living water.

The expression *"living water"* in the language of the prophets points to the goods of salvation of the Messianic era (See Is 12:3; 49:10; Jer 2:13; 17:13). But the woman does not understand that language. She thinks of a miraculous water that would quench the thirst of the body.

However, that was enough to awaken in her the desire for his gift: *"Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw"* (Jn 4:14).

To accept the waters of salvation, we must examine our conscience.

This is why Jesus brings the conversation to a deeper level, as He asks the woman: *"Go, call your husband,"* (Jn 4:16). These are the words Jesus uses to invite her to examine her conscience. And she does so and answers correctly: *"I have no husband"* because she has had five husbands and is living illegally with a sixth.

Jesus makes it possible for this woman to discover the need to be saved and to question herself about the way that can lead her to salvation, carrying out with her a real and proper *"examination of conscience,"* helping her to call by name the sins of her life.

To accept the waters of salvation, we must welcome God's grace into our souls.

For this reason, the conversation goes even deeper. It turns into the question of how to worship God properly. The woman said: *"Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you people say that the place to worship is in Jerusalem"* (Jn 4: 20).

Jesus's answer rises far beyond the current understanding of worship, and he announces that true worship is based on the offering of the heart rather than on the sacrifice of animals. This is to worship *"in spirit and truth"* (Jn 4:24).

The new place of worship is the spiritual temple, the soul that welcomes Christ's message and is illumined by the Spirit of truth. When this happens, conversion happens. When conversion happens, we are transformed, like the Samaritan woman, into apostles of truth.

Then we recognize Jesus, not only as the prophet who can read our hearts but also as the Messiah who can heal our hearts. There is no surprise that after that happened, the Samaritan woman ran to her fellow townspeople and proclaimed with great joy: *"Come see a man who told me everything I have done. Could he possibly be the Messiah?"* (Jn 4:29).

Jesus is the Messiah who comes to establish the kingdom of truth.

This is the sign the Samaritan woman discovered: *"He told me everything I have done."* (Jn 4:40).

This is the sign that Jesus confirms before Pontius Pilate. Pilate said to Jesus: *"Then you are a king?"* Jesus answered, *"You say I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."* (John 18:37)

Yes, the Samaritan woman listened to the voice of Jesus, as did many people from the town who later told the woman: *“We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world.”* (Jn 4:42)

Jesus alone can quench our thirst and save our souls.

How true are the words of the Samaritan woman: *“Give me this water, sir, so that I shall not grow thirsty!”* This is the true description of our need. It is also what the psalmist describes: *“As the deer longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, the living God”* (Psalm 42: 2-3).

Let us be open to the living waters of salvation: let us examine ourselves in the sanctuary of our consciences and accept Christ’s kingdom of truth; then, we will experience the joy of God’s grace in our hearts. Amen.