

3rd Sunday of Lent (A)
(Exodus 17:3-7 / John 4:5-42)
19.03.2017

Dear brothers and sisters

Today's gospel passage is well-known as the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. This gospel passage illustrates **the power of dialogue**.

It was noon, the hottest part of the day. Jesus, tired by his journey through Samaria, was seated by the well. A Samaritan woman came to draw water. We have to know that Jews did not speak with Samaritans, still less with Samaritan women. Moreover, this Samaritan woman should not have gone alone to a public place at noon. For Jesus it is evident that this woman who came to draw water is someone who is thirsty not only physically, but also morally and spiritually. This woman is seeking life, true life, divine life. She is seeking to become a human being in the noble sense of the word. Jesus could have ignored her, which would have been socially and politically acceptable and even correct. Instead Jesus feels in the deepest part of his heart that he has to enter into dialogue with her in order to reveal to her the life she is looking for.

The problem with which Jesus was confronted at this stage was to find a way (in Belfast, they would say 'the trick') by which he could enter into dialogue with her. He had an idea. Jesus said to her: "Give me a drink". In other words, Jesus approached her with humility and told her that he needed her help. And it worked: a Samaritan woman who would have never spoken to a Jew entered into dialogue with Jesus because he approached her so simply, so humbly.

There is a great lesson for us here. Sometimes we are called to enter into a difficult dialogue with someone and we don't know where or how to start. A good way to start is to ask for a little help from that person. In so doing, we valorise the person and defuse any resistance. What seemed impossible or at least difficult becomes possible and sometimes even easy.

During her dialogue with Jesus, the Samaritan woman is led to discover progressively who Jesus is. For her, Jesus is a Jew. She calls him: "Sir". Then step by step, through dialogue, she is led to recognise that Jesus is a prophet, later on she comes to see that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, and finally she knows that Jesus is the Saviour of the world. Dialogue enlarges our mind and our heart by opening up new horizons before us. Dialogue helps us to discover the truth of persons and events. Dialogue allows life – true life – to emerge.

Her dialogue with Jesus helps the Samaritan woman to discover also the symbolism of water in biblical thought. Obviously water is made to quench our physical thirst. But in the Bible, spring water symbolizes the life that God gives, the life imparted by divine wisdom and the Law, and also the life communicated by the Holy Spirit. In her dialogue with Jesus, the Samaritan woman discovers that, if at first she needs water to quench her thirst, she also needs -and perhaps this above all- the life of God, the life with God which will deliver her from the weight of her sin, the weight of her guilt and shame, and the fear of death. As she talks with Jesus, the Samaritan woman discovers that she is speaking with someone who is compassionate and merciful,

someone who looks at her with love and respect, trust and hope, someone who helps her to stand up and walk reconciled with herself from hence forward.

Her dialogue with Jesus helps the Samaritan woman to deepen her understanding of true worship, worship according to God's heart, worship in spirit and in truth. True worship takes place within our hearts and is not linked to any one physical place.

As a fruit of her dialogue with Jesus, the Samaritan woman who, before her meeting with Jesus, had no relationship with Jews and even hated them, became an apostle of the Lord. Her testimony about Jesus was so powerful that she brought a lot of people to the Lord.

Today's gospel passage reminds us of the importance of dialogue in our lives. We need to hear this, for so often our lives are made up of monologues. Let us think of our prayer life which should be a relationship with the Lord through the mediation of his Word. How often our prayer times are monologues in which we ask questions and give the answers. An absence of true dialogue leads to death. True dialogue leads to life. This is obvious in our personal life, in our family life, in our communities' life, in our work places and even in politics.

Let us think of those who were elected to the new Stormont Assembly. If they were really ready to dialogue in truth, to listen respectfully to one another with an open mind and an open heart, to compromise and move on, Northern Ireland would suddenly become a better place in which to live; suspicion and hate would give way to confidence and trust.

Let us not fall into the easy way of blaming others, politicians for example. Let us begin at home, let us begin with ourselves where we are, here and now. Let us enter into dialogue with one another. Life comes at this price! Like the Samaritan woman, we shall experience that dialogue is powerful, dialogue brings life.

Amen.