

## Gospel text

### **John 4: 5-42**

5 Jesus thus came to a town in Samaria, called Sychar, near the land that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 There is the source of Jacob. Jesus, exhausted by the trip, sat there, right against the source. It was around noon. 7 Then a woman from Samaria shows up to come and draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink". 8 It must be said that his disciples had gone to town to buy food. 9 The Samaritan woman therefore replied, "How can you, being a Jew, ask me to drink, I who am a Samaritan woman?" (Indeed, Jews and Samaritans have no relationships). 10 Jesus begins to answer her, "If you knew the gift of God and whoever said to you 'Give me to drink', it was you who would have asked him and he would have given you water full of life". 11 She retorts, "Sir, you don't have a bucket to draw water and the well is deep. How can you get water full of life? 12 Are you then greater to our father Jacob, who gave us the well, who drank his water and his sons and his beasts?" 13 Jesus answered her with these words, "Whoever drinks this water will again suffer from thirst. 14 On the other hand, if anyone ever drinks water that I will give him, then he will not be thirsty for all eternity. On the contrary, the water that I will give him will become in him like a source of water gushing into an eternal life". 15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I will no longer be thirsty and have to go through here to get the water."

16 He said to her, "Go, call your husband and come back here." 17 The woman replied, "I have no husband". Jesus replied, "It is right to say 'I have no husband'. 18 For you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you say is true". 19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I notice that you are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that Jerusalem is the place to worship". 21 Jesus said to her, "Trust me, Madam, the day is coming when you will not worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. 22 You worship what you do not know. We, on the other hand, worship what we know, since liberation comes through the Jews. 23 But the day is coming, and the day has come, when the genuinely religious will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. This is the type of religious people that the Father is looking for. 24 God is spirit, and therefore religious people who want to worship him must do it in spirit and in truth". 25 The woman said to him, "I know we are waiting for a messiah, the one called Christ. When he comes, he will enlighten us on all things". 26 Jesus said to her, "It is I who speak to you now."

27 Then his disciples came and were surprised to see him chatting with a woman. However, no one dared ask him, "What are you looking for?" or, "What were you talking with her?" 28 The woman then left her jug of water, went back to the city and began to say to people, 29 "Come see a man who told me everything I did." Would not he be the Christ?" People went out of town to meet him.

31 In the meantime the disciples begged him insistently, "Master, eat!" 32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know". 33 The disciples asked each other, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?" 34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do what the One who sent me asks me to do and to carry out his action to its fulfillment. 35 Yourself do you not say, 'Four more months, and what will be the harvest?' Here I say to you, 'Lift up your eyes and contemplate the fields whose whiteness shows that they are ready for the harvest. Already 36 the one who harvests receives his wages and harvests fruit for eternal life, so that the sower rejoices as the reaper. 37 In this respect the saying holds true when it says, 'another one sows, another reaps'. 38 I have sent you to harvest a field where you did not give any trouble. Others have taken pains, and you have received the fruits of their pains".

39 Several Samaritans in this city believed in him because of the words of this woman who testified, "He told me everything I did". Once near him, the Samaritans insisted that he stay with them. And Jesus stayed there two days. 41 There were many more people to believe because of his word, 42 so they said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe. We have heard it ourselves and we know that he is the true liberator of the world".

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## Gospel commentary - Homily

### **If you knew how loved you are**

The account of the Gospel of this Sunday is generally considered by the believing community as one of the most beautiful texts of Christian literature: we are taken by the force of its images, the significance of its symbols, the incredible journey of a woman. However, the very beauty of this scene risks playing a bad trick on us, that of giving the impression that its meaning is obvious, or even worse, staying with the images without entering into their meaning.

Tell me, how do you understand this word in the mouth of Jesus: "If you knew the gift of God and whoever said to you 'Give me to drink', it was you who would have asked him and he would have given you water full of life"? Do not come too quickly with the Holy Spirit and the notion that Jesus is the Son of God, because you risk missing out on everything that is implied by this word.

"If you knew the gift of God". What does the Samaritan woman ignore? And by the very fact, what do we ignore? The clue that is left to us comes from the event that will shake this woman: this man knows me, he knows me in the intimacy of my married life. This discovery is so important that it will come back as a leitmotif. In other words, from the start I was with you, from the start a relationship existed between you and me, and you didn't see it. It is the same heartbreaking discovery that Paul makes when he hears Jesus say to him: "Why are you persecuting me?"

I talked about relationships, not just knowledge, because it is about discovering how much we are loved, and love breaks our isolation, it creates a relationship. In the same way, I cannot perceive true love without feeling that I am known in the innermost of me, that I no longer need a mask, that I can be true, without fear of speaking about my ex-husbands.

But there is even more in the story: "If you knew the one who said to you, 'Give me a drink'." Why is it important to identify the one through whom love comes? My perception of the one I love will have a structuring effect on my life, i.e. I will become the one I love. This is why it is so important for this woman to enter in turn into the universe of Jesus, this is also why it is also for us.

"If you knew" Why do you think this knowledge and this relationship are not obvious, and that one can easily miss it without seeing it? Love is like great realities of life, it can only be discovered by living it. Jesus took the time to simply sit by the well and, throughout the dialogue, he entered the world of the Samaritan woman. It is a mirror of my own experiences of loving and being loved. There is no shortcut.

What happens when I feel deeply loved, and see the one who is the source of the universe as revealed by Jesus of Nazareth? The story of this Sunday speaks of water full of life. Everyone can refer to their love experience to grasp how this image describes the new energy and the life force that one feels in the depths of oneself. I no longer need all these "You must" from preachers who make us feel guilty. And I know that true love can only generate life, never destruction and death.

When we really and deeply live our love experience, we realize that we are evolving, and even very quickly, and in a way, there will never be an end to this movement. This is why water full of life, i.e. water flowing non-stop, describes well what is happening. After 5 or 10 years, the Samaritan woman must have been unrecognizable to those who have known her in the past. I personally hope that at the end of my life, I will still be evolving.

The story of the Samaritan woman is presented to us at this time of Lent when it is customary in our churches to insist on the need to convert. However, the water full of life of which the Gospel speaks is a pure gift from God, totally free, coming from no personal effort, not following any Ignatian exercise whatsoever or long period of prayer. It just takes a totally open heart. Unfortunately, we know from experience, our heart only opens when it is exhausted, when it has emptied all its tears, when it is in the middle of the desert, after five husbands, like the Samaritan woman.

-André Gilbert, Gatineau, October 2004