

Sunday of the Samaritan Woman

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Christ is risen!

In today's Gospel reading we heard of our Lord's encounter with a woman of Samaria at the well in Sychar near the plot of land that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.

This Gospel reading, like last week's, is given to us in order that we might, while still celebrating the Lord's Resurrection, look ahead to the feast of Pentecost and prepare ourselves for the descent of the Holy Spirit.

If in last week's Gospel we saw how the Lord was preparing the Hebrew's to accept the Mystery of Baptism by sending down an angel from heaven to stir the water in the Sheep's pool, this week we see how the Lord was preparing the Gentile people to receive this great Mystery of Baptism.

For the Samaritans as we know from the Gospel were Gentiles – people with whom the Jews had no dealings.

But as the Fathers tell us, the Samaritans were a special brand of Gentiles, with whom the Jews not only had no dealings but with whom the Jews had a certain form of animosity. This is because the Samaritans were not really true Gentiles but members of a heretical sect of Judaism.

The Samaritans were an ethnic group from the tribe of Levi, the tribe of the priestly order, and they derived their name from the Hebrew word, "Shamerim" which means "the keepers of the law". For while the Samaritans separated themselves from mainstream Judaism they still considered themselves adherents to the teachings of Moses.

In fact, the Samaritans claimed that they alone were the true worshipers of God for they kept the ancient form of religious practices which predated the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem. And for this worship, the Samaritan met on Mount Gerizim the place where they believed that not only did Abraham had offered up his son Isaac but also the place where God chose to establish His name in chapter 12 of Deuteronomy; this place they called Bethel, meaning the House of God.

All of this animosity and anger is hinted at by the Samaritan woman herself when she asked the Lord why He who was a Jew was asking water from her who was a Samaritan.

And so we see that the Lord did not come to Jacob's well that day seeking just water – the Lord came seeking the salvation of this woman, and this group of Samaritans who had separated themselves from the salvation which is of the Jews. For the Lord thirsted not so much for the water of Jacob's well, as He did for the salvation of the people of

Samaria. And this is why the Lord said to His disciples, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work.

What is the will of God? And what is His work? Well, the will of God is that all might be saved, or as the Apostle Paul writes to the Thessalonians, that each and every person might be sanctified, possessing his or her own vessel – his or her own body and soul – in sanctification and honor. And the work of God is to bring about this sanctification, to teach each and everyone of us how to live honorably and in holiness.

And so, we see the Lord in His conversation with the Samaritan woman, instructing her how she can be sanctified, how she can learn to possess her vessel in holiness.

It is with this sanctification in mind that the Lord says to the woman, “Woman, go and call your husband.” This seemingly simple question initiates the dialogue, wherein the Lord reveals to the woman that not only does He know that she has had five husbands and the one with whom she is with is not her husband, but also that He is the Messiah, the One whom she has been waiting for, the One who can release her and her people from their sins.

Now the Lord does more than simply tell the woman that she needs to reform her ways by learning to possess her vessel – her soul and body – in honor and sanctification. The Lord also tells the woman how she can receive this sanctification.

And this teaching, which the Lord gave to the Samaritan woman, and to us who are here today, can be summarized in three points:

First, the Lord says, “Woman, what I am offering you is not earthly water – water which quenches one’s thirst only for a time – I am offering you the water of sanctification, the water which can well up inside you, the sanctifying Spirit which can renew your vessel and make you a partaker of eternal life.”

The Lord is offering the gift of the Holy Spirit, which will be bestowed through the waters of Baptism and which will fill the heart and mind of man to its very depths as earthly water fills a well dug in the ground. The Lord is explaining that through the Holy Spirit, man will never thirst again for all his true and eternal desires will be met – that is man’s thirst for union with God will be quenched.

This is the first teaching of the Lord: That He has come to offer to the Samaritan woman and her people the water of salvation through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Now the second teaching follows upon the first: that the Holy Spirit will not only sanctify the mind and heart but it will also teach one to worship in spirit and in truth.

Christ says to the woman, “the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

In the Gospel of St. John, the Lord says that the Holy Spirit will guide His followers into all truth for He will take of what is His – what belongs to Jesus Christ in His divine nature, and declare it to them, to the disciples. That is the Holy Spirit will give to the followers of Jesus Christ, that which wells up in Christ Himself – sanctification, truth, and all the gifts of the Spirit, thereby enabling to worship the Father spiritually and truly.

And so the second teaching is that the Holy Spirit will give to men the power to worship God in spirit and truth.

And the third teaching likewise follows upon the second: that those who receive the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, and the power to worship God in Spirit and truth, will not need to worship in any particular place be it Jerusalem (where the Temple of God was built) or on Mount Gerizim (in Bethel where the Samaritans considered the House of God to be) or anywhere else for that matter, for through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit men will themselves become Temples and Houses of God.

With this truth in mind, St. Paul writes to the Corinthians saying, “Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” And then St. Paul continues, “If anyone defiles the temple of God, God shall destroy him. For the temple of God, which you have become, is holy.”

And here we come full circle. Remember we started out saying that the will of God is that all might be saved and sanctified, and that the work of God is to bring about this sanctification. Then we saw how the Lord taught the Samaritan woman that she must possess her vessel in sanctification and honor, leaving behind her former ways which led to defilement. And then He revealed to her how she can do this – by becoming a Temple of the Holy Spirit through the sanctifying waters of Baptism.

During the Feast of Mid-Pentecost, which we are celebrating, we recall how in the middle of the Feast the Lord went up to the Temple and cried out to all, “If anyone thirst let him come to Me and drink!” This was the Lord’s invitation to the Jews to accept the sanctification of the Holy Spirit. And today, the Lord went up to the woman’s temple, the mountain where she said her fathers worshipped, and there He offered her this same sanctifying water.

In the Jerusalem, the Lord offered the sanctifying waters to the Jews. At the well in Samaria, the Lord offered these same sanctifying waters to the Gentiles. This is because as we have said, the Lord wills that all might be saved, both Jews and Gentiles alike – that all might have their thirst quenched – that all might be united to God.

And through the gift of Holy Baptism and the renewal of the Holy Spirit, which we anticipate on Pentecost, the Lord offers this same fountain of eternal life to us.

Let us not reject the sanctification of water and the Spirit as did the Jews, but let us like the Samaritan women not only accept the salvation offered through Christ but let us also

bring news of this sanctification to our loved ones and our friends so that all might be saved.

For as the Lord said to His disciples long ago, so too does He also say to us today, “Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.”

Let us drink deeply of this water which the Lord offers, and let us be renewed in this Holy Spirit, which alone can sanctify our vessels, which alone can teach us to worship the Father in Spirit and truth, and which alone can make us Temples of the Living God.

To our One God in Trinity be the glory: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Christ is risen!