

Third Sunday in Lent (A)

March 19, 2017.

'Give me a drink' (Jn. 4:7).

The conversation of Our Lord and the Samaritan woman revolves around the gift of water. This request is presented to us to contemplate on this third Sunday in Lent; and it is a request that we will hear again during the Commemoration of the Passion of Our Lord when on the Cross Our Lord will say, *'I thirst' (Sitio)*. These are the penultimate words of Our Lord, spoken at the end of His earthly life. The last are: *'It is finished'*. These last words are a confirmation of the mission and purpose of His life and ministry, particularly on Calvary but also in His dialogue with the Samaritan woman: to reveal the Father, *to present the Father as love and mercy* (Cf. John Paul II, *Dives in misericordia*). Every gesture, every word of Our Lord is a reflection of the Father; every word is an echo of the Father for He did not come to speak in His own name but in the name of the One who sent Him: *My teaching is not mine, but His who sent me* (Jn. 7:16).

'Give me a drink' (Jn. 4:7). What is the meaning of these words? Why are they proposed for our reflection and contemplation during Lent? They express God's desire to give His life and grace to every person. *We are not the casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each one of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary* (Pope Benedict XVI, April 24, 2005). The two requests for water, *'Give me a drink'* and *'I thirst'* reveal a profound reality of God's nature and our own human nature. St. Augustine expressed this truth poetically: *God thirsts to be thirsted for*. This does not mean that God needs us but because God is *love and mercy*, He wills to give and to share His life. In turn, this thirst on the part of God helps us to understand man's thirst. The mystery of these words reveals the truth about the human person. Man also thirsts and this thirst can only be fully satisfied by God. This is a spiritual thirst that is often encountered in the texts of Sacred Scripture. In the course of time the symbolic union between physical thirst and spiritual thirst became so rooted in the Hebrew mind that the Hebrew word *nefesh* can mean both *thirst* and *soul*. The Psalms present the human person as a living thirst for God. The Psalmist cries out: *As the deer yearns for flowing streams so my soul longs for thee, O God* (Ps. 42).

The human person possesses an innate thirst for something outside of the self for fulfillment. We can fulfill ourselves. We can be somewhat fulfilled by achievements, possessions, relationships but only one thing can ultimately fulfill us. That something is the unconditional love of God that in Christ Our Lord becomes a Someone. This is what Our Lord offers the Samaritan woman when He says to her, *'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but the one who drinks of the water that I will give will never be thirsty. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water gushing up to eternal life'* (Jn. 4: 13-14). The water that Our Lord gives is the unconditional love of God in the life of grace; and only when we ourselves receive the unconditional love of God through our individual act of repentance and faith do we become capable of sharing that love with others. This is our mission through faith – to share our knowledge of Christ. *There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him* (Pope Benedict XVI, April 24, 2005). So the Samaritan woman left her water jar and went

back to the city. She said to the people, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' (Jn. 4:29).

Our yearly observance of Lent, a tenth of the whole year, is dedicated to a concerted effort to deepen our friendship with Our Lord and to discover anew our innate thirst for God. This is a thirst that cannot be satisfied by anything other than God. Our Lenten discipline makes us more keenly aware of this thirst and disposes our souls to have this thirst satiated by God. In this light every Lenten season becomes a journey into the depth of this mystery and we affirm anew that only God who reveals Himself as *love and mercy* can satiate this thirst. On the Cross, when Our Lord cries out, *'I thirst'*, He both reveals and unites in Himself these two dimensions of our thirst for God and God's thirst for our love.

Our Lord declared, *If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water'* (Jn. 7:37). We who by grace have come to know the love of God our Father in Christ Jesus Our Lord and have received this living water can endeavour to satiate the thirst of Our Lord especially by our intercessory prayer for the conversion of poor sinners. St. Teresa of Calcutta saw herself as called by God to live with and to serve the poorest of the poor and to satiate the thirst of Our Lord for souls that He made known with His *'I thirst'*. In fact, in every chapel in the convents of the Missionaries of Charity, the words *'I thirst'* are etched on the wall beside the crucifix. The Sisters Adorers of the Precious Blood founded in St. Hyacinthe, Quebec in 1861, also dedicate their lives to satiating the thirst of Our Lord and praying for all of humanity. During this holy Lenten season we pray the *Seven Offerings of the Precious Blood* before the rosary each day. These beautiful prayers, like the love of God, have a universal scope and encompass every need and condition. I have encouraged you at different times to make these prayers part of your daily devotions, and I do so again today. You may find copies at the shrine of the Sacred Heart. They will give a focus to your life of prayer and expand its scope and deepen your union with Christ the High Priest.

The Passion of Our Lord gives a human face to the love of God for a fallen humanity, and Our Lord's cry on the Altar of the Cross, *'I thirst'*, inspires us to pray for the conversion of poor sinners as Our Lady requested at Fatima. *Sitio. I thirst.* These words inspired Mother Catherine Aurelia, the Foundress of the Sisters Adorers of the Most Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. In a monograph called *The Sitio* that she wrote for her Sisters, Mother Catherine wrote these words which I hope, will inspire all of us to deeper prayer and devotion: *The mysterious Sitio which the Divine Crucified One made resound from the height of His cross has found an echo in my poor heart. I have meditated on it, I have relished it, I have understood it, and I, in turn, have cried out in burning ecstasy: 'I thirst.'* *In the ardent zeal urging me on, I would like to be a magnet to attract all hearts in order to give them to Jesus Christ....I implore Him that He Himself bring all hearts under His gentle sway to make them so many springs of living water where He may quench His burning thirst.*

'I thirst'. Let us ask Our Lord that these words may also find an echo in our own poor hearts; that we may be generous with our prayer and penance for the conversion of poor sinners, especially those most in need of God's *love and mercy*.