



## SUNDAY OF THE SAMARITAN WOMAN MAY 22

### THE GOSPEL READING

#### John 4:5-42

[The Samaritan Woman]

*At that time, Jesus came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.*

*There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw."*

*Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly." The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that Jerusalem is the place where men ought to*



worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

Just then his disciples came. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but none said, "What do you wish?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" They went out of the city and were coming to him.

Meanwhile the disciples besought him, saying "Rabbi, eat." But he said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him food?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work. Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest. He who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony. "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard ourselves, and we know that this is indeed Christ the Savior of the world."

## **THE SERMON**

In the Gospel passage, the Samaritan woman comes to draw water from a well. Christ asks her for a drink and then has a conversation with her. Among the things that Christ says to the Samaritan woman, He refers to the grace of the Holy Spirit as living water that leads to everlasting life. The water from the well quenches one's thirst only temporarily. In comparison, the living water that Christ provides lasts forever because it offers the spiritual nourishment which is necessary to unite us to Him. As persons created in the image and likeness of God, the purpose of our lives is to become closer to God and progress towards His Kingdom.

Christ also confirms to the Samaritan woman that salvation comes from the Jews. When he says to her: “we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.” This means that Jesus Christ appeared in the world as was foretold from within the Jewish tradition. This fact is not without practical consequences for us today. The tradition of the Old Testament, including the tradition of the Law, the History, the Wisdom and the Prophecies of the Jewish heritage, all of this now forms part of our tradition. It no longer *exclusively* belongs to the Jews. To this day, the Old Testament remains a central and cherished component of the liturgical and theological tradition of the Greek Orthodox Church.

In order not to be misunderstood, the Lord also specifies to the woman that the time is coming when we will worship the Father in spirit and truth. On the one hand, salvation comes from the Jews. It originates in the specific cultural and historical setting of Judaism. On the other hand, salvation moves on from there. It cannot remain in its original setting, as it continues to develop according to the will of God. As a result, the worship of God cannot be confined to a specific location. God can be worshipped *everywhere*. It is not the location that is important but the fact of gathering as the body of Christ, coming together as a community of believers to worship God and enter into communion with Him.

Historically, Samaritans were considered to be enemies of the Jews, even though both Jews and Samaritans share a common religious heritage. Also, the Samaritan woman in the Gospel passage had a scandalous past with multiple husbands. She now finds herself without an escort when this dialogue with Jesus takes place. The disciples of Christ are astonished by what they see. Their teacher is engaging in this conversation with a woman who is both a Samaritan and has this sinful past. As Saint John Chrysostom remarks, the disciples “marveled at the exceeding kindness and humility of Christ, in condescending to converse with a poor woman, and a Samaritan.”

Christ’s dialogue with the woman is not trivial either, because the Lord reveals to her that He is the Messiah. He says to her, “I who speak to you am he.” Christ reveals His divinity to this woman. Not even Christ’s disciples had at this point really understood who their teacher was, and what was His true purpose. In the circumstances, it is astonishing that Christ reveals Himself to a woman He just met, who is unaccompanied, with a sinful past, and belonging to a group that had splintered itself from Judaism.

In this way, the Gospel passage illustrates once more the great mystery of our faith. God did not come into the world as a mighty leader, to engage in discussions with the rest of the world’s leaders in the great palaces. He did not come to hold debates with philosophers and scholars. He did not come to lead political revolutions. He came to his lowly disciples as a *friend* and as a *teacher*.

Christ teaches publicly, out in the open, for all to hear. He speaks to everyone. He does not discriminate on the basis of religion, gender or ethnicity. He does not ignore the

sinner. On the contrary, He ministers to those in need. He visits with the tax collectors who were despised. He accepts to be anointed by the sinful woman. Christ does all of this out of love for humankind. During the Vespers service for the Sunday of the Samaritan Woman, there is a hymn that expresses Christ's intention as follows: "He truly wanted to get her back, since she had been caught by the hostile enemy; He wanted to give her a drink of the water of life, since she was dreadfully aflame in her offenses, as the only compassionate Lord who loves humanity."

Christ continues to appear to us, in our lives, in the same way: God who is a *friend*, God who is a *teacher*, God who offers us *love* and *freedom*. We are called to actively participate in the life of the Church, not to live the Church as spectators, but to taste this living water that Christ offers to the Samaritan woman. We are invited to open ourselves to the "food" the Lord mentions in the Gospel account to his disciples. This food implies that we concentrate our efforts on the spiritual life, focus on carrying out the will of God, and not be distracted by worldly concerns. He reveals Himself to help us in our journey in the faith, not to grant us privileges and honors.

It is difficult to remain disciples of Christ only during Holy Week. Every time we participate in the Divine Liturgy, we relive Holy Week, and we celebrate the Resurrection of Christ. We do this not because God needs something from us. We do it for our own enlightenment, for our own redemption, for our own inspiration, in order to live out our lives as fully as possible in the light of Christ.

With Christ's guidance, we are called to reorient our priorities in life, to reassess what is most important from what is least important. In the context of our own specific life circumstances, let us try to understand what it means that Christ through the Cross has conquered death.

God is here to support us and guide us in every step of the journey of our faith. Let us open ourselves to Christ's calling, let us remain close to Him, and let us keep the joy of His Resurrection always present within us.