

Third Sunday of Lent, Year A (March 15, 2020)

## **Meditation on Jesus' Encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4:5-42)**

### **A Unique Lent in History**

On February 27 we started this year's Lent, but from the following day on public Masses in most of the dioceses of Japan were suspended to help prevent the novel coronavirus from spreading.

In our diocese of Saitama, seeing the seriousness of the situation, also in accordance with the decision of the national government, we have prolonged this suspension until March 29; on the 25<sup>th</sup> I will summon the Advisory Committee again to determine what to do after the suspension period, especially how to celebrate the Holy Week. Because of special circumstances, I'm afraid the Chrism Mass scheduled to celebrate at Mito Church in Ibaraki Prefecture will be done with the presence of priests and deacons only, without the participation of the religious or the laity.

### **True Faith, True Prayer and Religion**

When I was a seminarian, I once had to analyze the meaning of what Jesus spoke about the true worship "in Spirit and truth" (John 4:23). My professor found it difficult to pass me because I had understood almost nothing on the subject or the three questions to be answered. The questions were: Where must the true God be worshipped? Which religion is the true one? And what does the authentic religion consist of?

Reviewing what I had written, I was amazed that all my comments were copied from some books. The professor immediately noticed it and instructed me how to reference citations. When my paper was revised according to his instructions, he passed me saying, "When you grow more mature over time, you will understand what you wrote."

### **"Worship in Spirit and in truth" (John 4:23)**

This Lent I have been doing my daily meditation with the comments in the book, *The Religion of Jesus: Commentary to the Daily Gospel (2020)*, by José María Castillo:

“The religions of all times have been concerned, above all, with answering these questions: the definition of a sacred space and the search for its center. Jesus said that, from that moment on, the true religion, the true temple, the center of everything, is neither in this place nor in another, ... but in the heart of man, .... In other words, what happened in Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman is the very place. Jesus made a transition from outer religion to inner spirituality. And there, in that, is where the sacred is. The most sacred thing is honest life and goodness.”

I am convinced that true faith "in spirit and in truth" makes us follow in the steps of Jesus who lives with God and with our neighbors, and that our life with Jesus lets us experience what the Samaritan woman experienced as John tells us: "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." (John 4:13-14).

### **Invitation to Deepen the Paschal Path Further: Living in Communion with Jesus**

This month, while priests offer Mass for all of you every day, many of you may miss joining Mass in your parishes. I am sure, however, that none of you will lose faith in Jesus or in his Church even when you cannot attend Masses. I think that over time we will begin to feel that something important is missing in our lives until we become convinced that the Mass is at the center of Christian life. Even in the extreme situations as seen in many regions of the world where the local faithful can attend Masses only a few times a year due to the lack of priests, we will be sure to feel that without Masses we cannot be a sacrament or instrument of salvation, nor can we be servants of people, especially of the poorest and neediest, because only by feeding on Jesus we Christians can witness to Christ.

### **Spiritual Communion**

At this time when we are unable to participate in the Eucharist, I propose that we offer the

Prayer of Spiritual Communion every day to continue to be united with Jesus, our Bread of Life. In this way we can recover a somewhat forgotten spiritual devotion among us.

\*Prayer of Spiritual Communion:

My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the Most Holy Sacrament.

I love you above all things and I desire to receive you in my soul.

Since I cannot at this moment receive you sacramentally,

Come at least spiritually into my heart.

I embrace you as if you were already there

And unite myself wholly to you.

Never permit me to be separated from you.

Amen.

Note: All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (NRSVCE).