

Sunday of the Samaritan woman (John 4:5-42) (Archimandrite Zacharias Zacharou)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



This Gospel reading is exceptional, loaded with great and sublime truths which the Lord condescended to impart to a dissolute woman, a heretic who had led a reckless life and hailed from Samaria, an abomination for the Jews.

The reconciliatory way that Christ relates with this woman gives an example for

converse with our fellow men. In this passage, on the one hand, we behold the majesty of God's love, hunting man along all the paths of his life to work his salvation, and on the other, man even in the extremity of his fall able to co-work with God and ascend to an angelic height.

The Jews considered the Samaritans unclean. This is superseded by Christ's action, so the Apostle Paul could later declare with boldness: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus'[1]. Wherever the grace of Christ is working, that is, the grace of deification, every kind of human distinction is abolished. The nationality of Christians is not Greek or Russian or Romanian, but all those who have received holy Baptism. United in the body of Christ they become 'a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a people belonging to God'[2].



The Lord in His unsearchable care for mankind's salvation, crossed Samaria and 'being wearied with his journey', sat next to Jacob's well to rest, 'like a young lion lurking in secret'[3] awaiting his prey. Even though He is the wellspring of living water, He addressed himself to the Samaritan woman who came to draw water, saying: 'Give me to drink.' The Lord who hungers and thirsts for the salvation of mankind, humbles Himself pretending that he has need of something that this woman could offer Him. Spiritual people often follow the example given by the Lord in this dialogue, longing to impart to those around them the truth of God's love which burns within their bowels, they use the technique of humbling themselves before their fellows, seeking some kind of favour. God Himself, if He did not humble himself before His creatures, lowering Himself beneath all creation, would not be

able to impart to us His virtue, His salvation, His life. Through His extreme self-emptying, He revealed His love for man, stronger than death, which 'wounds the chosen one'[4]. The Cross became an irresistible centre of attraction for each that met Him, and compelled them to respond with love of virtue to His spotless love no matter the price. The soul thinks: 'If this is God, then quickly let me abandon everything and seek only union with Him'[5].

Within the bosom of the Church, authority is spiritual. The nature of this authority differs from the potentates of this world. It is born of humility. When man strives to become the nothing of humility, he attracts the grace of God, which imparts to him true authenticity, a paradoxical authority, the authority of grace and of Christ's love. The 'ignited word'[6] of God transforms his soul and clothes it with power. Then, even his own human word becomes authoritative, as we repeatedly discover through our contact with the Saints, informing hearts with grace, crushing bones, and granting rebirth.

The Lord offered 'a well of water springing up into everlasting life', because God created man for eternity and his spirit imperatively demands eternal life[7]. However much the world tries to quench this thirst, offering transient pleasures and earthly glory, its radiance dissolves like smoke, leaving the heart empty and desolate. Spiritual hunger and thirst can never be satiated. When man starts to taste the grace of God and drink the water of life, he goes forth 'from strength to strength'[8], ascending to a continuously greater fullness of love, life and joy.

The word of the Lord, 'Give me to drink', is heard enigmatically, as he purposefully stirs up spiritual tension in the Samaritan woman and her goodwill to collaborate in the miracle which will happen, the regeneration of her soul, the transformation of a heretical and wanton woman into the holy martyr and equal to the Apostles Photini. Christ Who in the beginning the Samaritan woman called Lord and later 'greater than Jacob', began to be revealed to her as a prophet as He gently reprovved her way of living, in order to stir up spiritual thoughts within her. In order to ascend to the 'mountain of the Lord' and receive 'the blessing of God', that would become a wellspring of living water within her, she needed to draw nigh to Him with 'clean hands, and a pure heart'[9]. The Lord does not blame her, but with great graciousness He reprovves her. There is a reproof that is debilitating and a reproof that is prophetic, that heals, reveals new horizons and brings inspiration to man. The wise of this world have been trained to analyse behaviour and expose insufficiencies and imperfections, but through this man is only crushed and led to despair, so he walls himself within his ego. By contrast, when the word of God acts, it accomplishes two works: it illumines everything, and at the same time it imparts

power and inspiration for healing and transcending every passion and sin.

The Lord reproveth the Samaritan woman, yet He does not demean her. He does the same with all mankind. Although He chastens man and allows sufferings to wound him, it is not to punish him or take revenge. Rather it is out of desire to bring the betrayer of His grace into a state wherein he can receive His gift, honour it and keep it as a precious pearl, multiplying it unto his salvation and that of his fellows.

The Samaritan woman's heart was transformed by the energy of the Lord's presence and His word. In her amazement, she forgot her corrupt life and started to theologise. Her mind opened and she obeyed the revelation of new life that resonated powerfully in her heart. She understood that this saving power was not morality but theology, the true knowledge of God that orients man's life and inspires him to define his path aright. In her question about the place where God is worshipped, Christ responds in line with her intuition, thus gradually revealing higher truths, that through the grace of the Holy Spirit from now on worship would take place in temples not made by hands and that the heart of man would be built up into a tabernacle of the God of Jacob[10].

When the Lord says that 'God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth'[11], he speaks very specifically and clearly. God is not a philosophical idea. He is God the Father, Father of the Lord Jesus Christ by essence, and Father of all mankind by grace. God is Spirit and those who desire to worship Him must do it in the power of the Holy Spirit and in the truth of the only-begotten Son, Who boldly declares 'I am the truth'[12]. True worship is thus offered to the Holy Trinity as 'consubstantial and undivided'.

God is worshipped in the Holy Spirit that proceeds from the Father, but also in the spirit of truth that possesses man when he mourns and repents. God is Spirit and Truth, while man becomes spiritual and true, when he lives with repentance, when he confesses before Him that against Him only he sins, but it is only Him that he worships;[13] his worship consists of bitter and wretched tears for his uselessness, and gratitude for His spotless love. The Holy Spirit reveals the gladsome Light and the Truth of God and, at the same time, the gloomy darkness and falsity of man. It grants man courage to confess the cosmic truth of his fall and turn to seek God's great mercy.

The beauty of such a God enraptures and inspires man, it begets longing for Him unto the end, while the vision of the luciferic darkness and corruption he bears within him provokes hatred for everything that obstructs union with his 'extreme desire'. Saint Sophrony writes: 'Full of revulsion for ourselves and the evil nesting

within us, we long to be like unto Him in humility, and this longing becomes our mortal thirst.' According to the word of the Lord, without this holy hatred no one can be His disciple[14]. Only when man comes to hate the hellish darkness within him, can he offer up prayer that is well-pleasing to God and has an incorruptible, imperishable energy which God Himself will preserve eternally.

Despite the moral disarray of the Samaritan woman's life, she had thirst for God and theological thoughts in her mind, which 'as a sweet savour', according to Saint Gregory Palamas, attracted the Spirit of God to rest upon her[15], so that she could receive a sublime revelation from the Lord Jesus: 'I that speaketh to you, I am the Messiah'. The Lord utters this word now, as the Samaritan woman has already apprehended His Divinity within her. God convinces through His presence; He cannot be understood by the mind, but when man bends over his heart, he receives proofs there of His truth by the grace of the Holy Spirit. The word of His grace, becomes a law of life, no longer the Judaic law 'written in tables of stone', but spiritual 'in fleshy tables of the heart'[16].

[1] Gal. 3:28.

[2] 1 Pet. 2:9.

[3] See Ps. 16:12.

[4] Saint Silouan, p. 239.

[5] We Shall See Him as He Is, p. 178.

[6] See Ps. 118,140.

[7] See We Shall See Him as He Is, p. 16.

[8] Ps. 83,8.

[9] See Ps. 23,3-5.

[10] See Ps. 131:5.

[11] John 4:24.

[12] See John 14:6.

[13] See Vespers, Day of the Holy Spirit, 6th prayer of kneeling.

[14] See Matt. 10:37-9; Mark 8:34-37; Luke 14:26-27.

[15] See Gregory Palamas, Ὁμιλία ΙΘ': «Εἰς τὸ κατὰ τὴν Σαμαρείτιδα τοῦ Χριστοῦ Εὐαγγέλιον· καὶ ὅτι δεῖ καταφρονεῖν τῶν παρόντων», 9, Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ, Συγγράμματα, τόμ. ΣΤ', ἔκδ. Βασ. Ψευτογκᾶ, Θεσσαλονίκη, 2015, σσ. 230-231.

[16] See 2 Cor. 3:3.