

The water that I will give will become in you a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.

Halfway through today's Gospel reading a noticeable change takes place. The story begins with Jesus seated wearily upon the edge of an ancient Samaritan well. He asks a Samaritan woman, approaching to draw water, for a drink. She backs off, because he is a Jew and Jews and Samaritans don't get along. Probably there's also a gender problem. She is heir – as women were in those days – to a sense of “gender inferiority” (about which she harbors deep resentments). Thus her reaction: *How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?*

Jesus lets the hostility pass and responds: *If you knew . . . who is asking you for a drink, you would be asking him and he would provide you with living water as from a spring – sparkling, flowing, tasteful, not stagnant, stuck in your ways – as you are.*

And stuck in her ways she IS! Hidebound by her inherited prejudices toward Jews, her standardized “us” versus “them” ideologies, by her low sense of worth which has allowed her to be worked over by five husbands and now a sixth guy plays the part for services rendered, she is also stuck in routines like this – climbing her way to a cistern - not even a well but a collector of seasonal rain - and doing this several times a day (the work is women's work, beneath the effort of Samaritan guys). It's likely that she is rarely in a good mood, judging by how she responds to Jesus' offer of fresher water than she will get from her well. Her reaction? *Sir [Big Shot?], she says, “you don't even have a bucket . . . and where is this fresh water?”*

But slowly a loosening, a fluidity takes place. The smart talk exchange phases into a dynamic of curiosity. A conversation begins. As Jesus speaks of fresher water available, she asks where she can get it. Then, when Jesus brings up her “husband”, she changes the subject. Now she wants to talk about their differences of religion. Still Jesus keeps drawing her out of herself. She dares even apply the terms prophet and rabbi to this fellow she had just summed up as “a Jew”.

Still engaged, she now switches to the future – “I know that the Messiah is coming . . .” This gives Jesus an opening to reveal how close her conversation with him (*conversatio* is an old Latin term for prayer) has brought her to her true self, or may I say: transformed her from stagnant, stuck in place to overflowing; as in verse 14: *the water that I will give will become in people a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.*”

She drops her water jar and the smidgen of vitality it represents. She returns *in haste* to her village, she says to everyone, “Come and see a man who has told me everything I have ever done – ever been and can be!” Soon she generates a whole procession of people who now want to share her experience, to make their lives flow again like wellsprings.

This story is about you (including you men) at every Eucharistic encounter you have with Christ in the Scripture readings and at communion time. Such moments offer you a chance to open up a conversation with Christ, with your Judeo-Christian tradition – in depth - that can get your lives, your souls, your *intelligence* flowing again – possibly after too many years of routine existence.