



Third week of Lent 11/12th March 2023 – Reflection Mgr Daniel McHugh

“We have heard him ourselves and we know he really is the saviour of the world”

I started to write this Reflection on International Women’s Day. Pope Francis at his General Audience on 8th March said I thank all women *“for their commitment to building a more humane society with their unique ability to perceive reality with a creative eye and tender heart”*.

I noted too The Catholic Women’s Association Cameroon, an Apostolic organisation I engage with as Ethnic Chaplaincies Coordinator, in their WhatsApp group have been posting each other all Blessings. This coverage led me to consider the history of this Day which celebrated 100 years of its beginnings in 2011.

One of its main goals is celebrating and making visible the achievements of women. So, I was glad to see the post of Fr. Jacob Prasad an Indian Priest has highlighted the importance of women in the Scriptures. He writes:

“Every woman who has walked with God has a story to tell”

- Sarah will tell you: *“Nothing is too difficult for God”*.
- Hagar will tell you: *“Even in the desert, God is there”*.
- Rahab will tell you: *“God can use anyone”*.
- Hannah will tell you: *“My God answers prayers”*.
- Ruth will tell you: *“It’s not over till God says its over”*.
- Esther will tell you: *“God is able to transform an unworthy into a noble”*.
- Elizabeth will tell you: *“Even if the age is advanced, you will give birth to a great man”*.
- Mary will tell you: *“It will be done to you according to the Word of God”*.
- The woman with the blood issue will tell you: *“When all has failed, God never fails”*.
- Mary and Martha will tell you: *“Dead things can come back to life”*.

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- Dorcas will tell you: *"God never forgets what we do for others"*.
- And Eunice will tell you: *"It is never in vain to pray for our children"*.

He concludes,

Dear woman, it's a great pleasure walking with God. Then he adds this accolade:

"No relation is complete without a woman in the world. She plays a role of 'loving Mom...a caring sister....an understanding wife and a lovable daughter... You have everything in you and that's the reason why the world is celebrating you...Happy Women's Day".

As it happens, on the Third Sunday of Lent 12 March, it is a woman who is central in the Gospel of St John, the Samaritan Woman at Jacob's Well and her encounter with Jesus. We learn more from this story not only about the important role women play in the evangelising mission of the Church, but also Jesus's attitude to women. The Apostles we are told in the Gospel were surprised to find him talking to a woman. A man in those times did not speak to any woman, not even his wife in public; and this was a Samaritan woman, regarded by Jews as ritually unclean. Jesus was not constrained by the customs of his time in relation to women; elsewhere in the Gospels we see how important they were among his disciples. Martha and Mary stand out of course, and we're told he spent time with them and their brother Lazarus.

The fact that this particular woman lived a lifestyle that was not publicly approved of – she had 5 husbands and was on the outskirts of her own community, coming to fetch water at times when others were not there – did not stop Jesus from entering into a conversation that led to his revelation that he was the Messiah, the one who would offer her living water. This woman became a missionary to her own people; as a result of her witness many came to hear what Jesus had to say.

The Gospel passage for the 3rd Sunday ends with these words from those who were encouraged by the testimony of the Samaritan woman to go to meet Jesus:

"Now we no longer believe because of what you told us; we have heard him ourselves and we know that he really is the saviour of the world".

There is much for us to ponder on this Sunday as we reflect on the key role of the Samaritan Woman in spreading the Gospel:

- *who is Jesus, the living water, the spring leading to new life, to eternal life within us?*
- *how do we witness, give testimony to others of that life in the Spirit that underpins everything we are and do?*

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- *how do we bring others to Jesus so that they will discover who He is for themselves?*

This Third Sunday those who enrolled to become full members of the Church at Easter will be prayed for as they are presented with the Creed, our proclamation of belief. I think the Sunday Eucharist is where so many find their way to Jesus. Perhaps that is how we should begin: invite people to come to meet Him in the Eucharist, where the believing community gathers to hear His Word. Easter Sunday would be a good day to start our missionary work, giving testimony to the new life, the living water he offers to all.

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