



“Then Jesus declared, ‘I who speak to you am he’” (John 4,26) Teams of our Lady welcoming the couples of today

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Introduction: *at the school of the Samaritan woman*

Lourdes. We finish our three-year path meditating once again on chapter 4 of John’s gospel: the Samaritan woman. This will help us to re-read the message of Lourdes 2006; in its third part, it proposes three guiding lines: to be witnesses, in our time, of a happiness based on the Gospel; to be witnesses of the Gospel of marriage, announced to everybody and to everything; to be witnesses who are engaged in spreading conjugal spirituality and in presenting the sacrament of marriage to young generations. Furthermore, it underlines: “At the beginning of the 21st century, the Teams of our Lady have to treasure the words pronounced by Father Caffarel in 1987 at Chantilly: *“The Teams of our Lady have not taken into due account that spirituality evolves according to the age of couples and according to the situation in which these couples find themselves”*”

- **The Samaritan woman.** We look, above all, at the Samaritan woman’s personal meeting with Jesus and at the dialogue that derives from it. It is an invitation to overcome a stalemate, made of religious acts and often institutionalized loyalties, to arrive at the true meeting with Him who saves us. The faith of the woman and of the Samaritans has become a “dry well”. It is necessary to pass from a faith made of religious practices to a faith in spirit and in truth. The Samaritan woman is called to a “new creation” and she has a choice in front of her: either to keep old beliefs and acquaintances and look for the living water and justification in the dry wells of sanctuaries, laws and uses, or to choose the “eternal life” and accept Jesus’ offer of transformation and “transfiguration”. Our time, characterized by complex realities, urges us to escape useless certainties and not to fall in the risk of relativism or in false assurances. In our story there is hope, there is good, but without a meeting face to face with Christ, we risk to be out of the paths of history and unable to give answers for ourselves and for others.
- **F. Caffarel.** At the basis of f. Caffarel’s vocation there is a meeting, his meeting with Christ. It is a radical meeting that changes all his life. It makes him say that “everything is played” for him. His life is all an acceptance of Christ inside him. This is the origin of his choices as a priest and of the charisma he left us. For f. Caffarel this is an absolute value. It is a constant search for Christ, listening to His word. His meeting is not a set of practices and rules, but a search and a personal meeting with Him who transforms all our life.

In 1987, weighing all the pros and cons of his movement, after underlining its positive aspects: “reconciliation between love and marriage”, studies on the relationship among Word of God, the couple and all the realities of conjugal and family life..., he thanked the Lord for “the marriage of our two sacraments”, marriage and orders – you know the importance the movement gives to the priest’s active presence in teams. He was outlining an ideal path of work: the relationship between love and self-denial, the gift of oneself, the oblivion of oneself, the Christian meaning of sexuality: “couples should be guided towards the perfection of sexual life”. He finally augured a mission for the TOOLS: to renew anthropology, by stopping denying gender complementarity and refusing the manicheism of body and soul; to develop mutual help in order to walk towards a dynamic, active holiness that takes part in the evolution of creation. He particularly underlined some new points: it is necessary to take into account couples who didn’t have a catechesis, whose Sunday practice is not customary. The question of moral rules, defended by the Church and ill-lived; to look at those who wish to go further after twenty or thirty years of life in the team. To help couples to age well, to live the age of

retirement, to approach death. He finally insisted on the unity of the movement, that was extending to all continents.

- **The Church and the world.** Finally, the message of Lourdes calls us to an attentive dialogue with the Church and the world of today. A dialogue made of listening, obedience, but also proposals, paths and directions, that should be faithful to God and pay attention to our time. Lot has been said in these years about a Christianity that has to prepare in view of the third millennium. The efforts to realize the change of style that this involves look often like superficial *slogans*, aimed at hiding and perpetuating a lack of real creativity. To think that all can be resolved by a simple up-dating of language only – leaving the substance unchanged – would be banalizing the question. “It is not only a matter of finding new words, suitable to women and men of our time, in order to propose the Gospel to them, but, in a more radical way, of re-thinking it in the new mental categories of post-modernity. This should not be feared as a betrayal of the divine Revelation: on the contrary, it is the only way to remain faithful to it. Because the continuance of the tradition that has been reading the Holy Scriptures in the course of the centuries is not based on a barren, material repetition – otherwise we should literally follow the Jewish or Greek texts, in which they were originally written – but *it comes true* in the continuous translation of their message with regard to the most different cultural contexts. (G. Savagnone, *Il banchetto e la danza*, Paoline, pag. 6). Today we live a delicate time of passage. “Modern” culture, that has dominated Western countries for five centuries, is setting down, leaving its place to another, different culture, which is still so undefined that it can only be identified with respect to the previous one – this is why it is simply called “post-modern”. In such a context, the effort to express one’s own faith in a new way, appropriate to this radical transformation, becomes the most urgent task for Christians (idem p. 7). In the Lourdes document we find: *“The pedagogy of the Teams of our Lady has to be expressed in the language of today, that has to take into account the signs of the times. It is up to us to let it be asorbed in our culture without making it insipid; to simplify it, to adapt it to the age and the length of marriage life, facilitating its investigation without losing its essence. It is a path of happiness, both a human and a spiritual path”*. Unfortunately, our paths and our answers are not always able to see the richness of all continents: We confine ourselves to a typically western European mentality. Which paths? What to do?

Being pressed by the many situations in which we live, it is an urgent task for the Movement to look for answers as individuals and as teams. In his intervention in Rome, before card. Jullien and recalling the hearing of John XXIII, f. Caffarel reminds: *“We wish to answer the Pope’s confidence, but to do this it is necessary for us to have an exact view of our movement’s aims. This is why our pilgrimage is so important. It has to lead us to be more aware of God’s will on the teams, to ask ourselves about the way we have met this will and to decide to meet it better and better ‘with confidence and humility’, according to the Holy Father’s advice”*,

1. “I who speak to you am he” (Jn 4,26)

“Then Jesus declared, ‘I who speak to you am he’” (4,19-26). This is the decisive moment in the relationship between the Samaritan woman and Jesus. Being in front of a prophet, she asks a question of a religious kind: where to worship God? She is looking for the Messiah (that is Christ), like all Samaritans, who are waiting for a Messiah who will restore everything. “I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us”. Again she tries to escape through a religious question; this is the Samaritan woman’s last defense, the last attempt to elude Jesus.

The Samaritan woman’s path of faith

Starting from this question, Jesus makes her progress in a decisive manner, leading her to understand the content of God’s gift: that the Father can now be worshipped in spirit and in truth. To know God’s gift means to be aware that the man before her is not only somebody with whom she can speak of religious subjects. The decisive step will be to understand “who is” that Jesus in front of her, who is addressing her with such words. He doesn’t appear to speak directly of himself, but we readers know what Jesus will say afterwards: “I am the way and the truth and the life” (Jn 14,6). Jesus tells the Samaritan woman about the truth in which God has to be worshipped: He himself is the truth, because He is God who manifests himself as man. Therefore God is not worshipped in a place, He is not even worshipped by prayer or religious actions. God is worshipped entering the movement of Jesus, who goes towards the Father; meeting that Jesus who is the truth of God present in the world; entering with Him in the condition of children, and following Him. Now the woman learns the name of that gift, whose beauty and greatness she had perceived.

Worshippers “in spirit” too: this doesn’t simply mean “spiritually” (that is, with a purely inner worship), but it means: in the spirit that Jesus will give through Easter. Jesus refers to the moment when He, the truth, with the gift of the spirit, will make the Father really approachable. She not only understands who Jesus is, but also who God is, because Jesus calls him “Father” and tells her that the Father looks for “this

kind of worshippers” in spirit and in truth. He reveals the face of the Father, who desires to meet man; we are told something great: the meeting between God and man, realized in worship, is not only moved by man’s wish for something greater, capable of quenching his thirst, but it is moved above all by God’s desire too: God wishes to be met by man, to be recognized by him as the Father, to give Himself to him as life, making him capable of worshipping in spirit and in truth.

“I am”

The answer “I who speak to you am he”, doesn’t simply mean: I am the Messiah, as we know that, in the Bible, “I am” is the name of God. It is in the depth of his mystery that Jesus introduces himself: He is on the same level of God. The gift He has promised to her, then, is not a “thing”; the living water is not a thing, but it is Jesus Christ who reveals the Father; the “**I am**” that in the Exodus had manifested himself in fire, is now made visible in the face of Jesus.

It is a solemn messianic proclamation, an explicit self-revelation by Jesus, who dares to use an expression by which JHWH revealed himself to Israel. Jesus declares that He is the one who realizes the Samaritans’ expectations. They used to refer particularly to the Deuteronomy (18,15-18): “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him... The Lord said to me: I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth and he will tell them everything I command him”. They are waiting for the Messiah to be the new Moses: he will be a prophet, he will show the truth, will reveal everything that is now hidden, will teach the law to the Jews and to all the world. And they were waiting for him to be a political leader, the restorer of the state of Israel.

“**I am he**” is not only a simple declaration of identity, it is a theological declaration. It has to be understood in the light of Exodus 3,13 and following verses. “God says to Moses, ‘I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘**I am** has sent me to you’” It has to be understood also in the light of what happens in the garden of Gethsemane, when the soldiers of the temple are going to arrest Jesus: “**I am he**”, he replies. The soldiers fall on the ground; they are in the presence of God. (Jn18,5). “**I am**”, “**I am he**” is the name of God.

It is the deep identity of Jesus, Jesus son of God, Jesus God. He says to the Samaritan woman: “Not only you are waiting for the Messiah who will reveal everything, but ‘I am the Messiah’, ‘I am God’”. This is the same revelation of the burning bush. The Samaritan woman, opening herself gradually to the Spirit, discovers, in the Jew who asks her for some water, a mysterious character who is greater than father Abraham, a prophet who can read in her heart and in her life, the Messiah who is coming. Then it is clear that the Samaritan woman has now no escape, because the absolute Truth is before her. Either she accept Jesus for what he is, or she refuses him. She has to check her life in the light of this meeting. Jesus does not accept half-measures. At the end of the meeting he will define himself as the Saviour of the world. Therefore Jesus is not only the person through whom God saves, but He himself is the Saviour of the world. And he reveals to the Samaritan woman that not only God gives life through him, but he himself gives life. He is the one who gives life, he is the living water that quenches all thirst. This is very important for us too, because the Lord asks us a question that Jesus himself asked his disciples. In Caesarea Philippi he asked one day: “Who do people say the son of man is?” And soon after: “But what about you?” He asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’”. And this is Peter’s profession of faith: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt 16,13-20).

Meeting Jesus Christ

The personal meeting with Jesus changes the life of the Samaritan woman. “Who do you say I am?” Each Christian should answer this question in order to be able to live his experience of faith; that is: who’s Jesus Christ for me? Why have I to accept him in my life? Why has the Samaritan woman accepted Jesus’ revelation to her? “Who’s Jesus?” is the fundamental question in our experience of faith. Our experience in the teams, as f. Caffarel writes, has to lead us to the personal meeting with Jesus. “*To content oneself with being in the crowd that surrounds Christ without trying to get in personal touch with him, without a personal relationship with him, means to experience much indifference*” (letter of May 1954).

Christianity is not only a religion, it is the meeting with a person. Religion is man’s effort to reach God, a route that goes from man to God. Christianity is God who reaches man, is God who meets man. And it is not possible to live the experience of faith without a meeting. Many times even our catechetical and catechistic training, our knowledge of faith, reaches the point where it doesn’t say anything: because Christianity can’t be reduced to a doctrine. Christianity is a meeting, is the personal meeting between Jesus and me.

Very often, in teams, we limit ourselves to the application of a method as a cure-all in life. It is Christ who heals, comforts, gives strength to our life! On the subject of a superficial faith, f. Caffarel writes: “*Will this alarming symptom be found in our daily life that is, and has to be, union with Christ? Christ talks to you. Do you listen to him? Do you read the Gospel, his message, again and again to get in touch with Him? The main thing in a message is that it should make it possible a path towards the deepest feelings and thoughts of its author: Is it like that that you read the Gospel? Beyond words and examples, do you discover the living*

thought of the Son of God, do you perceive the beats of the eternal Heart, do you establish a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? He who reads the Gospel not only with his reasoning, but with a particular attention of the spirit, in inner silence, will soon meet Christ... I wish that everyone of you, the day he has not read the Gospel, will be hungry for it". (LETTRE MENSUELLE DES EQUIPES NOTRE-DAME VIème année, n. 3 – Décembre 1952).

From the reading of f. Caffarel, we find some directions to be rediscovered, to be made valuable or improved. Certainly the word of God, and we'll soon go back to that, but also:

- **Silence.** *"It is difficult to keep silence in our terribly noisy world. I don't only mean material noises, but all those elements, thrilling news... Nevertheless, inner silence is possible. To reach it, it is necessary to practise with patience and gentleness. Violent means have never been good pacification means. It is just a matter of pacification, through which all our faculties become receptive to God, ready to listen. Listening recalls a typical quality of silence: absorption. It is a vigilant attention, ready to grasp the inner voice"(L'Anneau d'Or; Mai-Août 1957; Seigneur, apprend-nous à prier; Lettres sur l'Oraison, La légende du chevroton, page 227)*
- **To overcome formalism.** *"St. Paul says that even he who gives all his goods to the poor can be a void and noisy drum. To be right in the eyes of God it is not enough to comply with some commandments, it is necessary to have the Holy Spirit and the love that is poured in our hearts. Woe to the virtuous, zealous, austere, heroic man, if he delights in himself, if he doesn't recognize himself as a sinner... if he doesn't open himself to the Saviour".*
- **Prayer.** *After some considerations about the publican and the pharisee at the temple, he says: "Your certainty is deceptive if it hasn't God as its foundation. Do I invite to leave the teams? Certainly not, but I invite to have recourse to the mean that can save from pharisaism: prayer. Authentic prayer is the only known remedy. This is why a religious group that is not a school of prayer is terribly dangerous: it is only a factory of pharisees ... Actually, if after two or three years of life in team you have not learnt how to pray and don't give prayer a central place in your life, you will not escape pharisaism...I speak of the true and prolonged prayer; it has the wonderful virtue to lead us to discover God and ourselves, God's holiness and our need to be saved" (LETTRE MENSUELLE DES EQUIPES NOTRE DAME 11 année No. 4 – Janvier 1958).*
- **Following Jesus.** *"The evangelic ideal is not, solely and above all, a set of doctrines to be adopted, but Somebody to follow. To follow, that is, to learn to think, act, live with Him and like Him. This Somebody is not a man of half-measures or compromises. He is the man of an only love and he doesn't ask his disciples less than this... Yes, Christ asks for everything... the intimacy between him and the disciple is established at the level of a total and mutual gift. But total gift means at the same time renunciation... This is the evangelic ideal. It imposes itself for all conditions of life: for married people and others. There isn't a Christian life with a discount for weak people... Man and woman, in and for their love, can and should arrive at the total gift to Jesus Christ. To realize this ideal, the Lord made of marriage a sacrament, that is, a human reality inhabited and intervoven by divine Love, that – as a powerful ferment – allows the spouses to realize what seems impossible to man, but is possible to God" (LETTRE MENSUELLE DES EQUIPES NOTRE DAMES XVI année – n. 2 – novembre 1962)*

The paths of faith

The woman's path ends in a new relational situation and, infected by the movement of Jesus, she widens the approaching circle. The *Samaritan woman* enters the stage as "a woman from Samaria" and leaves it as an expert of the source of "living water", aware that she is being looked for by the Father who wants to make her a worshipper. Her changed identity makes her an evangelizer who, through her witness, succeeds in convincing many to approach Jesus and to believe in Him. She who speaks of "drawing water" as of a task that requires effort and work, leaves now her water jar: Jesus revealed to her a gift that requires no exchange and that is given to her free. Like a water "welling up to eternal life", a stream of gratuitousness runs through the text and transfigures its characters: the woman, after her attempt to bring her people to Jesus, withdraws and lets them discover Jesus and believe in Him by themselves and not because of her witness. She was guided to her innerness through a patient path that made her go from dispersion to unification and she, a disciple of such Master, attracts and leads her people to Him.

The woman, leaving her jar at the well because she doesn't need that water any more, as her gift is "Another", now is not afraid of going and saying what Jesus told her: this is the sign of a real change. She goes to her fellow citizens and invites them to go to Jesus: the Samaritans will have then to make their choice, and they will do this, not only thanks to the woman's intervention, but because they have personally met Jesus.

Looking at the message of Lourdes 2006, let's ask ourselves if we have tried to realize some of its directions:

- *We have to undertake all necessary initiatives to help team members and the Movement to listen to the signs of the times, to learn how to communicate and talk about marriage and family spirituality.*

- *To have ears and eyes wide open with regard to all what happens in the world, paying attention to what some people call “the prophecy of the world”; to be receptive towards what comes from God, to perceive and make valuable what is good: these are the Teams of our Lady. They pursue and intensify investigations on every aspect related to marriage and, particularly, on his sacramental character. Let us be receptive with the reality of life of widowed brothers and sisters.*
- *Let’s try to stand by those who have to face the crisis or failure of their couple; let’s open our heart and undertake initiatives to plan and develop specific groups or movements, able to answer the new situations of these couples.*
- *Let’s support the couples that are not completely separated by the crisis yet and that can engage themselves in a path “to find each other again”,*
- *We should pay constant and particular attention to young people: those who are far from the Church, those who start again, those who don’t know Christ and the Gospel, those who don’t find a clear and essential meaning in marriage: all this will show that we are at the service of the Gospel of love between man and woman and entrusted with taking it to the world.*

In the light of chapter 4 of John, let’s make a synthesis:

- The **disciples’** faith: *“After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken” (2,22).* Our path in history is subject to the hard work of searching, though with hope, but the disciple’s faith is only born in front of the gift of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection: this is the centre of God’s project witnessed by the Scriptures.
- The path of faith really involves the foundation of a new life, under the action of the Spirit who blows where he wants. The following are its three steps: to see the signs, to listen to the Word, to contemplate and receive Jesus’ love.
- To have faith in Jesus is not only a theoretic matter, but it means **to perform the truth**, to do the truth, that is, to be willing to allow life to become “true” of Jesus’ truth. Faith grows and becomes ripe if Jesus’ truth transforms our life, so that truth is done in it. With the radical and deep bars that sometimes block our heart, we do not reach the light of Christ.

Listening to God: like Mary, Word and prayer

One of f. Caffarel’s favourite subjects was the devotion to Mary. It is not a case that our name is Our Lady. Henry Caffarel showed his confidence in her intercession. In one of his editorials (quotation from f. Fleischmann), he starts from the fact that Christ himself loves his mother, “among all the creatures of a predilection love: she is the first after the Father. Can’t this love for the Virgin be in me if I am united to Christ?... But be careful! The love for Mary is not a tender feeling: it is wonder before the most glorious and holiest of the creatures, it is filial thankfulness towards the most Mother of all mothers, it is active will to please her, to help her in her task, that is just a task of motherhood at the side of all men...” (letter of May 1952). Mary is somehow the most adequate icon of what I have till now outlined. She lives the Mystery in the constant effort to grasp its meaning, in the various experiences in which she is involved and that constitute her story. “Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Lk 2,19). That of Mary is above all a memory: she “treasured up”. Mary carefully guards the actual facts that happens to her in the time and space where she lives, because it is there that the divine will reveals itself to her. But she doesn’t limit herself to guard them: she ponders them. The Greek verb used by the evangelist is *sympallein*, that means *to unite, to connect*. It is reason that draws an only thread from a multiplicity of elements, establishing causal connections, grasping analogies, finding constants. Mary, in her faith, meditated. And, in this meditation, she too, like her son, grew. The episode of Jesus who got lost in Jerusalem and was found in the Temple, with the narration of his parents’ reaction, informs us that this growth has been gradual and, as for all human beings, marked by pauses, returns, doubts: “But they did not understand what he was saying to them” (Lk 2,50). St. Thomas wrote that “man’s complete happiness consists in a supernatural vision of God. But man can’t reach it except in the way of a disciple who learns from God. (...) Now, man doesn’t appropriate this teaching immediately, but gradually, according to his nature”. Spiritual life – as the great teachers of the past taught – is not a condition acquired once and for all, but it is a process, a path, that is marked by significant but not exhaustive stages. Mary walked along this path. The woman who was at the feet of the cross, in the act of uniting the supreme sacrifice of herself to that of her Son, was no longer the same woman who, many years before, had been troubled at the angel’s simple greeting. Every Christian is called to walk on this path of deprivation and grace. In the awareness that the Mystery does not frustrate his story, but accompanies and welcomes it with his endless mercy. (Savagnone op.cit. pp. 81-82).

- **Blessed are those who listen to the Word.** In an age dominated by word, communication, image, we are attacked on all sides by messages that ask for our listening and attention. This is one of the believer’s urgent tasks, in a world that has almost lost the capability of communicating. The title “attentive Virgin”, the first of the four that the *Marialis Cultus* gives to the Virgin Mary, seems to me topical and full of meaning. It is necessary to listen to man, but it is even more

necessary to be listening to God. "Hear the word of the Lord" (Is 2,10; Jer 2,4; Am 7,16) is the fundamental religious principle in the Scripture. The biblical revelation has manifested itself to us mainly as word. To God who speaks we owe "the obedience that comes from faith" (cfr. Rm 1,5; 16,26; 2 Cor 10,5), the only one that can save. The messianic people is the community that listens to the voice of the Lord. Mary, who, in the obedience that comes from faith, opens herself to the word of God, is the first among the believers, the *attentive Virgin*. According to the *Marialis Cultus*, the listening, that is, the faith of Mary, was "the gateway and path to divine motherhood" (MC 17). It is faith that makes life prolific (cfr. Heb 11). Word, for Mary, is not simply the book of Scripture, but is the gift of God, the Verb of the Father, to whom she gave birth in time: Christ the Lord, of whom she was a humble and faithful disciple. To give birth to Christ is not only Mary's task: he has to be born in the heart and in the life of every believer. Everybody who receives the word of God, Christ, establishes very closed ties with him: "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice" (Lk 8,21).

- **Attentive Virgin.** The word of God, received by Mary, has brought happiness to the entire world. In this sense she is the cause of our joy, the source of the happiness of the Church of Christ. "... faith with which she, who played a part in the Incarnation and was a unique witness to it, thinking back on the events of the infancy of Christ, meditated upon these events in her heart" (MC 17). Christian faith loves history, to which it is closely connected. It is based on facts, on God's interventions in the time of men. Faith is above all based on the central event of the world's history, Christ, who gives a meaning to what precedes and what follows his coming. The believer is he who listens to the word of God and, in its light, examines the signs of the times. God's revelation is composed of "deeds and words having inner unity", that light up one another (cfr. DV 2). Mary, "who played a part in the Incarnation and was a unique witness to it", meditates with love, ponders with sapiential attitude, she thinks over such event and over all what is related with it. In the light of Christ, slowly and gradually, she understands the sense of the people of God's story and its destiny of grace; she understands the meaning of past and present facts, and the same meaning of her life devoted to the Lord. From her, every believer and the whole Church have to learn the attitude of listening, of meditation on the events, whose deep meaning is revealed in Christ. Like Mary, the Church is listening to the word of God, Christ, who introduces it into the mysteries of the Kingdom. The community of faith, assembled around Christ the Lord, carefully seated at the feet of the Master, receives his word and proclaims and "distributes it to the faithful as the bread of life" (MC 17). The Church, after conceiving the word, like Mary through the action of the Holy Spirit, gives it to the world as a message and a proposal of salvation; "and in the light of that word examines the signs of the times and interprets and lives the events of history" (MC 17). Following the Virgin's example, the community of believers has to live in a sapiential attitude. Full of wonder, it has to "ponder" what it can "see and hear" with respect to Christ and his mystery. In this blessed and dramatic meditation, it receives the revelation of the mystery of the word of God, made flesh for our salvation; of the human existence, marked by trial and destined to glory; of the time when the work of salvation is going to be realized. The attentive Virgin Mary is a provocation for the believer and for the contemporary man, who are often absent-minded and confused. It is an invitation to meditate, to contemplate; to make room to the Word of God and to the human word in our life, in order to live responsibly in the middle of the world..

Praying the Magnificat is not a devotional act for us; it is somehow the outline on which we read our daily life. While we praise God with her, Mary teaches us to meditate and to guard the events of life in our heart.

3. "Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman"

The meeting with Christ now induces us to verify if, as teams, we still have in us the living water necessary to announce the Gospel of marriage. Like the disciples, we often find that we are unable to understand the ways that the Lord is outlining.

- **The humanity of today: What kind of Christian training and training in the movement?**

It seems to me that the texts I have quoted so far, and f. Caffarel's solicitations, make us ask ourselves how our paths answer the questions of the world. Is the concern for a wider spread enough, or do we also need the consolidation of our teams? The text of John 4 makes us meditate: knowledge is not enough; a true, deep and personal experience is necessary. *Knowledge* alone appears to be sterile: the Samaritan woman addresses Jesus in an interrogative way, expecting a progress in knowledge from him ("How can you ask me...?", "Where can you get...?", "Are you greater than ...?"). The woman's words, that reflect the beliefs of her people, assert the difference among ethnic groups, beliefs or theologies; they divide people and prevent them from getting in touch; they reduce the expectations about the Messiah, who, in their opinion, will make them have access to a *knowledge* ("he will explain everything to us").

Jesus offers an "alternative knowledge" and invites to leave the "many knowledges" to enter a truth that can't be reached through vagueness, but through actual and tangible reality. His words don't aim at widening knowledges, but at inducing a change of life. Both "Jacob's well", the symbol of the wisdom given

by the law, and “what is written in the Law” (Lk 10,26) lose their validity and are replaced by the “living water” and by the invitation not *to read*, but *to watch* people and their real behaviours. It is *doing* and not *knowing* that we obtain life. A final *knowledge* replaces temporary ones, and it is not in the future but *now* and *thanks* to the word of Jesus, that we can reach this knowledge. *Gender* categories and stereotypes are also overcome: the woman begins surprisingly to speak and becomes a *witness and an evangelizer* of her fellow citizens, carrying out a task that was reserved to men. Our charisma in the Church and in society presses for this.

Some fields are of particular concern to us:

The theology of marriage. F. Caffarel, in his meditation upon marriage, offers some very remarkable paths. His spiritual heritage finds here a field for deep investigation. At the school of St. Paul, he investigates more and more the reality of conjugal life in the light of the union with Christ. It is no wonder to learn from the Bible that love between man and woman is one of the great symbols of God’s love for men. In the biblical idea sexuality is not sacred; but it is called to express and deepen the relationship of the couple with the Lord. This is specific of Christians: the relationship between faith and sexuality. Christians have to unite “in the Lord” (1 Cor 7,39). The love that two Christians have to feel for each other in Christ does not replace sexual love, is not superimposed; it gives it its full meaning. Eros is taken in the agape. Love lived in faith is the final meaning of sexuality.

In our teams we have to carefully investigate the theology of marriage. A lot has been done, but much has to be accomplished yet, to really put ourselves at the service of the world.

Sexuality. Sexuality is the symbolic expression of the love between Christ and his Church; it can be understood only on the basis of man’s total vision given in the New Testament: man is a being that is connected horizontally with others, vertically with God. The true meaning, the value by which sexuality has to be measured, is the man created by God, freed in Jesus Christ, placed in front of his neighbour. Man, freed by Christ, is called to live his sexuality freely too, but responsibly; in Christ sexuality is freed as absolute sexuality: it becomes relative to the neighbour and to God; it is called to be a language of love, communion and life. Too many times, as a new synedrion, we judge and condemn deviances in the field of sexuality. Jesus, before the Samaritan woman, is not contented with underlining and condemning her affective disorder: on the contrary, he raises and transforms her by a true and personal meeting.

We can understand, then, that the holy writers of the Bible used conjugal union to symbolize the relationship between God and his people. The Old Testament constantly compares the relationship between God and the chosen people to the relationship between husband and wife, and the most important element in this comparison is faithfulness. This theme is opened by Hosea and continued by Isaiah, Ezekiel and many other passages in Psalms and Wisdom. The development of this topic ends in Paul and his letter to the Ephesians, that reveals the deepest meaning of conjugal union: the entire reality of the couple and of sexuality recalls the love conjugal mystery of Christ and his Church. The complete conjugal union, till its physical consummation, symbolizes the mystery. All honest investigations arrive, at the end, to certain permanent values that in any time belong to man. We can see that human investigation meets here Christian revelation. The following are, in outline, three possible fields of investigation:

- **Existential and relative dimension.** Sexuality is a radical dimension of personal and social life; there is no personal realization without sexual realization. Yet it is not all in man: it is relative to the building of the world and of justice.
- **Love as a law for sexuality.** To humanize, sexuality has to follow the rules of love: to promote differences, to accept the necessary sacrifice, to build a durable alliance.
- **The three functions of sexuality.** The three functions of sexuality are articulated in the couple: the function of relationship, the function of pleasure, the function of fertility.

There is a clear need for investigating also in this field.

Sexuality, as it is introduced in the Bible, is a fascinating and risky route. It is a constitutive dimension of God’s creature: “God created man in his own image... male and female he created them” (Gen 1,27). Therefore it is not a secondary and trivial reality, an addition to an asexual human nature: it is a radical dimension of personal and social life. Therefore, the way sexual life is regulated is very important for the humanization of man; a well-lived sexuality can contribute to build man and woman, while, if it is ill-lived, it can ruin their life and humanity. In sexuality, faithfulness to God’s plan is therefore compulsory, it is a decisive step in the relationship with God. This view contrasts some present currents that tend to banalize sexuality and genital exercise, stating that sexual behaviours are indifferent. Sexuality, on the contrary, engages the whole person. St. Paul reproaches some Corinthians for reducing sexual activity to an indifferent act, like eating and drinking, while sexuality is a function of the “body”, that is, of the person as a concrete whole: sexual relationship is not a superficial deed that remains peripheric with respect to the person, but it engages the entire man (1Cor 6,16). On the other hand, sexuality has also the function of deeply uniting people, of making one “flesh” of them (Gen 2,24).

It is clear, then, how sexuality has to be understood according to biblical prospects: it is a force that involves all aspects of our being. While genitality is the sphere that is intended for pleasure and procreation,

sexuality is the entire human affectivity, is the whole nature of man and woman, as different and complementary people. Sexuality is that rich and deep dimension of our personality that allows us to realize ourselves by getting in communion with one another. A central statement of the Bible and a radical belief of Christianity is that sexuality, the couple and the family are not all in the life of a man and a woman. As for all other earthly realities, such as money, power, life on this earth, the couple is marked by a creatural and evangelical relativity. Since the creation, sexuality has been relative to the cultivation of the garden, to the building of the world (could one say to morals as the love of all what is human in man?); and, in the meeting with Christ, sexuality is relative to the search for the Kingdom. This relativity explains two apparently surprising statements in the New Testament: the acknowledgement of celibacy as another way of living sexual life; and the invitation, in view of the Kingdom, to leave one's father and mother and not to give an absolute value to the ties with one's spouse and children.

Family is not secondary, but it is second with respect to the solidarity with the Lord, and therefore with the poor and the oppressed people, requested by the Gospel. Sexual reality is a reality that is open on something wider than the family: the Kingdom of God and justice, or his plan for the world. The dream of a refuge couple, of a nest couple, so rooted in our time, is uprooted at its basis by Christ's call and the light that it throws on human sexuality. Pleasure, fertility, interpersonal relationship are really human and humanizing only if they are regulated by the search for a world that corresponds to God's project, that is a loving world.

Open your eyes and look at the fields. They are ripe for harvest". A dimension that still solicits us is the one of the diffusion and the mission. "**Open your eyes**" echoes Yahve's words to Abraham: "Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them" (Jn 15,5). Jesus invites to look at the fields that are ripe for harvest. Crops are ready and need to be gathered. He is the one who has sown and, thanks to his action, now the crowd is arriving. Watching the life of nature can help us to acquire the sense of a positive optimism, that pushes us to work without feeling tired, being sure that the Father always works and creates things for our joy.

Open your eyes and look far away. We can't do it if we do not leave our homes, our comforts, if we don't leave our small world that has often the boundaries of a team or of a culture. Yahve himself takes Abraham out of his tent, to make him see the heavens full of stars and give him the certainty of his fatherhood.

The development of the teams' spirituality in the world is the work of God, but it requires our personal engagement to grasp the richness of other persons and cultures. Of course it is not easy to *look up*. But we should measure our optimism more on the word of Jesus: "one sows and one harvests". In other words, we should learn to treasure our story, but we should also understand the dynamics of collaboration and teamwork. Everyone of us, in his fields of competence in the service, is a promoter of hope and joy.

With *patience* Jesus asks you to wait as long as the Lord has established for your growth, to be capable of letting others harvest where you have sown, with the belief that the fruit comes from God and belongs to him, that the field is everybody's and it is not our feud. The joy will be general: the joy of the sower meets the joy of the harvester. We experience this now already. In fact, the sacrifice, the hard work, the pains, the faith of those who have come before us have been a useful preparation for what we can now harvest with joy and thankfulness. This is possible because others have worked and we have succeeded to them in their work.

4. "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world" (Jn 4,39-42)

The story of our movement has left us some precious heritages that we can neither disperse nor preserve in wrong ways. The Samaritan woman goes from the narration of all what she has done to the announcement of Jesus, who has changed her. She lives her mission as a service, being able to stay aside and let Jesus speak. The Samaritans meet Jesus thanks to this service. They are also called to the same experience of intimacy that the woman has lived.

I believe that, at this point, our team experience urges us to verify some paths, in order to make them an announcement to the world:

- Today's couples and families: what mission and what evangelization tasks are waiting for the teams? I suppose the majority of team members is engaged in many services and activities in Christian communities. At the level of meditation and engagement, we are nevertheless urged to make our meeting with Christ more transparent. Love, that is at the basis of the choice, needs tangible signs that talk with love, truth and charity to those who are in search or live situations of disorder.

- We all have at heart the unity of the movement but also its richness. There are completely new realities and cultures that are different from the European one: how can we make them play a part in the movement and in the Church?

- As I have already said above, there is the problem of young people and young teams: their training and reception. F. Caffarel used to mention it already, pointing out that a basic Christian training is often lacking.

- Old teams and old people: a new planning towards Christ to make our aim truer and truer and more and more present: Christ.
- For this task it is necessary to go back to the sources. The Samaritan woman warns us not to become like those who try to satisfy their thirst in the traditions of the ancestors, in methods that are not capable of giving newness. She asks us to be open to Jesus, who doesn't propose any external ideal, but invites the woman, and then the disciples and the citizens of Samaria, to accept a free gift and not to be concentrated on themselves and on their own perfection, but on the relationship with their brothers. F. Caffarel used to remind us that the aim of the movement is Christ; to reach it, all means have to contribute: particularly Eucharist and the Scripture, but also the capability of making of them a school of Christian training, of investigation of the Holy Scripture in the light of Tradition; and then, mutual help, charity and the concrete points of engagement.
- Finally, the two sacraments that the Church calls sacraments of communion, marriage and orders, make us understand the mission of spiritual advisors in teams. The problem is not their lack, but their role and their training.

Conclusion

The feast of the Samaritans, who rush to Jesus, infects us. A feast is not a feast without a banquet. This is one of the reason why, in all the passage, there are references to the theme of food, of bread. The disciples have gone to buy some bread, some food, and this is said of them since the beginning (vv. 7 and 27). But it is not their bread that Jesus needs, on the contrary, He is the one who has a new bread, the bread of doing the will of God and accomplishing His work. "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work". The people who have met Him will have to learn to feed on the same food, trusting Him who is the truth of God in the world. It is again mission that is waiting for us.

While we receive the couples coming from the different cultural realities of our world, everyone of us should say: "We have not simply believed because of human words, but because we have ourselves listened with our ears, we have heard, we have seen". This is an invitation to experience the personal meeting with the Lord through his Word, through his sacraments. When we experience the meeting with Christ where we live everyday, where we carry out our service, our engagement, our activity, in our countries and according to our vocation, there the Church lives and teams carry out their mission.

We have many opportunities to approach the well of the meeting: each time we are thirsty for Eucharist, or meditate personally the Word of God. The evangelist John is anxious to inform us that everybody can be saved. The barriers of Judaism have collapsed. This conversion and acceptance of Jesus is an anticipation of the conversion of non-Jewish people, that the community will experience later on. John underlines a concept for which he cares a lot: faith becomes infectious. We need to see, to listen, to touch.

The meeting with Christ's witnesses is only the first step towards knowing "the gift of God". True faith is born when we personally meet Christ. Because witness prepares to faith, but faith remains a mysterious and personal fact.

The personal meeting with Jesus can't be limited to the reading of a text, or to the application of a method, but has to concern your inner path, your experience of faith, your experience of life. To have the experience of God, the Samaritans, invited by the Samaritan woman who becomes an announcer, have to leave their town and stay beside Jesus. Only he who becomes a traveller can recognize, in the man by the well, the Saviour of the world, the only one who gives life.