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4th Month: JANUARY

FAITHFULNESS TO THE WORD

From the Gospel according to John (4:1-29)

Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that "Jesus makes more disciples and baptises more than John" - although it was not Jesus himself who baptised, but his disciples. He then left Judea and headed back to Galilee. He therefore had to cross Samaria. He thus came to a town in Samaria called Sicar, near the land that Jacob had given to Joseph, his son: here was a well belonging to Jacob. Jesus therefore, fatigued from the journey, sat by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water. Jesus said to her: "Give me some, so I can drink". His disciples had gone into town to stock up on food. The Samaritan woman answered: "How is it that you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?". For Jews have no relationship with Samaritans. Jesus answered: "If only you knew what the gift of God is and who it is who is speaking to you, saying: 'Give me some water to drink!', you would have asked him yourself and he would have given you living water". The woman rebuked: "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep; whence then do you take this living water? Are you then greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it with his sons and his cattle?". Jesus answered, "Whoever drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give them, will not thirst ever again. On the contrary, the water that I shall give, will become like a spring of water for everyone, gushing forth for eternal life". "Lord," says the woman to him, "give me this water, that I may thirst no more and will not need to keep coming here to draw water". He said to her, "Go get your husband and come back here". The woman answered him: "I have no husband". Jesus says to her: "You have answered correctly: "I have no husband. For you have had five husbands and the one you have now is not your husband; in this you have spoken the truth". The woman replies, "Lord, I see that you are a prophet! Our fathers worshipped on this mountain; while you say that it is Jerusalem the place where we should worship from". Jesus says to her, "Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.

You worship what you do not know, while we worship what we do know, because salvation comes from the Jews.

But the time comes - and it is this - when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: in fact this is how the Father wants those who worship Him to be. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth". The woman answered him: "I know that the Messiah, called Christ, is to come: when he comes, he will proclaim all things to us, Jesus said to her: "It is I who speak to you".

At that moment his disciples arrived and were amazed that he was talking to a woman. No one, however, said, "What do you seek?" or, "What are you talking about with her?" The woman meanwhile left her vase, went into the city and said to the people, "Come and see a man who has told me all that I have done. Is he the Christ?".

Jesus was aware that he possessed a gift, indeed that he himself was the gift, that water that could quench the Samaritan woman's spiritual thirst. Notwithstanding this, He was a man (already this placed Him in a superior situation towards a woman) and he was a Jew (the Jews looked down on Samaritans) and yet he stooped down to beg the woman for some water. This is why we can



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understand how the woman was so surprised at his behaviour: "How is it that you, a Jew, are asking me, a Samaritan woman?".

Jesus deliberately addressed her from a situation of weakness and gradually and gently he raised the subject of the woman's moral weaknesses, to the point of prompting the question: "I know that a Messiah, called Christ, is to come: when he comes, he will announce everything to us". Jesus said to her: "That is me, who is speaking to you".

At Jesus' reply, the woman not only accepted the word, but the evangelist said that "she left her Vase there and went into the city". The encounter with Christ transformed her and she became a missionary among his people, thus fulfilling his promise, that whoever believed in him would become "a spring of water gushing forth for eternal life".

According to Jewish tradition Jacob would make water gush forth from the well of Sicar with the strength of his prayer, and the encounter with Christ transformed the Samaritan woman and every listener of his Word is transformed into a living spring capable of offering an answer of eternal life to the thirst, dreams and illusions of our time.

From a letter from Padre Pio to Raffaolina Cerase

Pietrelcina, 14th July 1914, Epist. II, p. 129-130

At this time do indulge in reading holy books; I desire fervently that you read such books at all times, such reading being of great pasture to the soul and of great advancement in the way of perfection, no less than that which is of prayer and holy meditation, because in prayer and meditation we speak to the Lord, while in holy reading it is God who who speaks to us. Try to treasure these holy readings as much as you can, and you will soon feel a renewal in your soul.

Before you begin to read such books, lift up your mind to the Lord and and ask Him that He Himself may guide your mind. Ask Him to speak to your heart and move your will. But this is not enough; it is also necessary that before you begin the reading, and from time to time in the course of the reading, you tell the Lord that you are not doing this out of curiosity, nor for thirst of knowledge, but solely to please Him and to give Him pleasure.

We have reached the central point of the letter we are meditating on. Padre Pio has shown Jesus not only as a model, but as a true guest of the soul, a guest who touches the whole being of a person, as an experience of all that is good. It is necessary to know him, through his Word, indeed, to get to "know him again" in those situations in our lives that obscure his presence and make it difficult to recognise his face.

It is important that we should notice an aspect that is not always sufficiently emphasised. The temptation of our time is to feed our interiority through a whirlwind series of emotions that follow one another, sometimes we are content with brief sensations in our inability to grasp something deeper. Padre Pio referred to holy books that nourished the soul, that helped us advance on the path of perfection. It sounded like he was speaking of general spiritual readings but then he added: "... in prayer and meditation it is we who speak to the Lord, while in holy reading it is God who speaks to us'. So - even if we do not find the expression Word of God - we can still believe that he is really looking at that Word which is the yeast that the woman put into the flour, just as Jesus says in the Gospel.

Our Spiritual Life and the Word

The letter to the Galatians speaks of the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit, both of whom are sent by the Father for our salvation: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we may become his adopted children. Indeed we are His children, and this is proved by the fact



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that God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, who cries out, "Abba! Father!". This means we are no longer slaves, but His own children and as children, we are also His heirs by the grace of God" (*Gal 4:4-7*).

This action of the Trinity, whereby there is the Father who sends and the Son and the Spirit who are sent, is described in the New Testament in two very precise phases: first it is Christ who receives the Spirit and then it is Jesus himself who gives the Spirit to his Church, with a very precise mandate to the apostles: receive the Spirit and then spread it through the sacraments.

In this regard, Pope Benedict XVI in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini*, explains that "the action of God manifests itself in history in the relationship between the Word and the sacramental gesture, through the performative character of the Word itself".

He himself explains what "performative" means: "For in the history of salvation there is no separation between what God says and what He does; his own Word is presented as living and effective" (cf. *Heb 4:12*).

Meditation on the Word of God, therefore, not only pushes us to behave correctly, but relates to what happens in our lives to the work of the Holy Spirit, who acts in us for our sanctification.

We listen and meditate on the Scriptures so as to understand who we are and the movements of God in our lives.

In a well-known and quoted letter addressed to Raffaolina Cerase, Padre Pio speaks precisely of the spiritual man and says that "Christians must not be content simply with knowing the divine law, but they must reach deeper for its meaning, that they may be guided. This cannot happen without a continuous meditation on the law of God. Through meditation Christians come to exult in joy, and their heart burst out into the proclamation of psalms and hymns to God. Hence all Christians striving for perfection, get to understand and to cherish the deep need for meditation" (*Epist. II*, p. 36).

Fidelity Day

We have already said more than once how important it is to go beyond the purely legal aspect of the Word of God; that is, it is not enough to consider what gives life (obeying the commandments) and what gives death (sin), but rather we are to choose life, and choose it in abundance. The Samaritan woman did not immediately understand what Jesus meant when he said: "Whoever drinks of the water that I will not thirst ever again ", and in fact she asked Jesus, of that water so that she will not have to drink any more.

This was a selfish question, like the many selfish questions we often tend to ask God through intercession of Padre Pio. The encounter with the saint has opened up new horizons, and made us realise that God can give us so much more, the Prayer Group has become for many the place where they can put their faith into practice.

Gradually we discovered that choosing 'what is good' means meeting Jesus who is the Word of the Father, belonging to him, believing that he is the effective Word who constantly works in our daily life. These considerations would like to shed a new light onto the Day of Fidelity, which we celebrate in January with the Prayer Groups. On the 22nd of the month we remember the dressing of Padre Pio and his commitment made before God to live the experience of St Francis. In the letter in which he spoke of his moment of deep and painful reflection before that choice, he referred to the voice of God, who prevailed over the other voices and finally exclaimed: "Where better can I serve you, O Lord, if not under the banner of St Francis?" (*Epist. III*, p. 1006). There are rules, there are commandments, but Padre Pio's fidelity is deeper, it is to a word spoken on him, which struck him and involved him, that took action in him.

This is the correct way to listen to the Word of God: we are to receive it as something that the Lord pronounces upon us, and to choose the Holy Spirit that is given to us by Jesus through his word.



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Longing for God

Padre Pio's spirituality can be summed up in that constant desire he had to reach out to God, a desire that was never fully satisfied, because every time the Lord granted him an interior grace, immediately afterwards he felt the suffering and dismay of abandonment. When he tried to describe what was happening to him, Padre Pio frequently used terms taken from Holy Scripture or he linked his experience to that of certain biblical characters. This is the sign of a faith rooted in the Word of God that found its points of reference and comfort there.

This image, which to most may seem far removed from our way of living our faith, is actually the element that must accompany our worship of the Word of God. While listening to the Word we get to know, love and desire His presence more and more deeply, we feel the need to quench our thirst with a water that gives us eternal life.

WHAT IS MEANT BY MEDITATION

See: Fr ATTILIO FRANCO FABRIS, *What does meditation mean?*, in <http://www.abbaziaborzone.it/2009/03/14/che-significa-meditate/>, accessed 12 June 2023, where the full article can be consulted

The idea of meditation is related to the root word 'haga', which is translated into Greek as *melete* and in Latin as *meditari*. The root word originally means '*murmuring in a low voice*'. The seat or organ of meditation is therefore the throat, the larynx.

Meditation originally had both a religious and a profane meaning (there is e.g. a meditating even against God: "*populi meditati sunt inania*" Sl 2:1).

Sometimes the aural-physical component is accompanied by a spiritual or mental component: "*Let no book depart from your mouth. Let not the book of the law depart from your mouth, but meditate on it day and night, that you may seek to act according to what is written therein*" (Jas 1:8), meditation on the law leads one to regulate one's life on this same law (cf. "*his law meditates day and night*" Sl 1:2). Meditation proceeds therefore from the heart, from the mouth of the righteous and has as its object the righteousness-law of God.

In Sl 77:13 ("*I repeat your works, I consider all your deeds*") and Sl 143:5 ("*I remember the ancient days, I recollect all your works, I meditate on your wonders*") 'haga' is placed in relation with *zakar*, the making of memory by pondering the wonders of God.

In the wisdom literature, while we do not find the root *haga* explicitly, we find a kind of meditation several times. However, we find a kind of meditation on the oldest texts that narrate God's interventions in the history of His chosen people (Wis 10-19; Sir 44-49).

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Consistent with the evangelical radicalism that characterises Padre Pio's life, the Groups commit themselves in a community celebration (for individual Groups or for the diocese) in which, always keeping to the theme of the year, the baptismal promises are renewed, together with the promise, presented in the same way, to commit themselves to live in a consistent way, as living testimonies.