

The Water of Sichar

The symbol of water predominates in Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman (cf. Jn 4: 1-42). Its meaning is found in Christ's words to the woman: "If thou knewest what it is that God gives, and who this is that is saying it to thee, 'Give Me drink,' it would have been for thee to ask Him instead, and He would have given thee living water" (Jn 4: 10). The conversation between the two rotates around the theme of "living water." The woman little by little is led by Christ into her heart and discovers the hidden meaning of those words and recognizes the truth about her life. The living water alludes to the gift of the Holy Spirit, that alone can quench the thirst and that brings man to his full realization (cf. Jn 7: 39; 14, 17).

The Water of Golgotha

Finally water appears on Golgotha (cf. Jn 19: 31-34) when the soldier pierces the side of Jesus with a spear and immediately blood and water flowed out. This does not just highlight the death of Christ but also the two sacraments of the Eucharist and Baptism that are symbolized by these and that by Jesus' death were consigned to the Church (cf. 1 Jn 5: 6-8).

Jesus unites the significance of baptismal water to His Paschal death and gift of the Holy Spirit, in the same way as in his conversation at night with Nicodemus the "being born anew from water and the Holy Spirit" refers to Baptism (cf. Jn 3: 5) and "come into the light" (cf. Jn 3: 21).

To conclude, the symbol of water accompanies Jesus' gradual manifestation of Himself to mankind and highlights the fecundity and life that God, in His Spirit, donates to those who entrust themselves to Him.



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Water



**Praised be You, my Lord,
through Sister Water; who is very useful and
humble and precious and chaste**

Water

by Don Giuseppe De Virgilio

An Element of Life

The theme of water appears at the very beginning of the story of mankind. In Genesis we read: the "Breath" of God stirred over the waters (cf. Gen 1: 2). One can say that a considerable part of biblical tradition refers to water as an inherent and fundamental element in the form of the cosmos.

It is a source of life and a cause of death. Water in its liquid nature is a simple and clear element but in a large mass it can become an uncertain and uncontrollable power. With water one refers to meteorological phenomena, geographical realities as well as to domestic functions. There are many references to water's function in the life of mankind; with bread, it is one of the vital necessities for life and blessed by Yahweh (cf. Ex 23: 25). Thus the recurring theme of bread and water is the happenings of important biblical figures such as: David, Elias, Elijah and Ezekiel. To the people who are thirsty and who murmur against God for a lack of faith (cf. Num 20: 24; 27: 14) God answers with the miracle of the water that flows from the rock (cf. Ex 17: 2-7). This appearance will be taken up again to explain the great prophecy of the new Exodus to the people of Israel (cf. Is 48: 20-21), when the Lord will make the desert flower and His chosen people will no longer thirst (cf. Is 43: 20). This is the fertile land promised by Yahweh that will be the "secure dwelling of His people (cf. Num 24: 7); and which foretells of the heavenly homeland where living water will flow, and, where the Lord himself will feed mankind (cf. Is 55: 1).

An Ocean that Frightens

A second aspect of water is that of a frightening and changeable ocean. We find this in three different frames of references in the Old Testament. The first is in the book of Genesis in the imagery of the creation of the world from "chaos" to an ordered cosmos obeying the laws of God (cf. Gen 1). A second time we find it in the recounting of the "universal flood," in which the primordial waters are ordered by God to come upon the earth from the heavens and from the great deep (cf. Gen 7-9) causing the return of chaos and death. Water here is seen as a force of chaos that threatens the world and its people. Finally, we find it a third time in the narration of the Israelites who were freed from Egypt with the crossing of the Red Sea (cf. Ex 14-15). In this last episode the destructive functional of water is seen in the light of the vanquishing of the Egyptians by the closing of the waters, and the saving of the chosen people of Israel by the parting of the waters. This salvation by "traversing the water" will become a part of the people of Israel's religious memory and experience (cf. Ps 77: 17; 20-21).

A Symbol of Purification

A further significance of water can be found in its connection with the ritual of purification. In the ritual of hospitality, water was offered to strangers in the washing of the feet (cf. Gen 18: 4). Together with oil, blood and fire, water became for the Israelites a necessary element in the ritual purification, a custom that was prescribed and handed down from the Levites (cf. Lev 11-15). From this originates its symbolism in the purification from sin with the sign of water (Ps 51: 9), and the remission of sin of a whole people by aspersion (cf. Ezek 36: 25), the symbol of the final pardon of God (cf. Is 1: 16) but most especially the understanding of baptism that unfolded in the preaching of the New Testament.

The Water of the Jordan

In the gospel stories the symbol of water took up again these three aspects: an element of life given to us by God (cf. Mt 10: 42; Lk 16: 24-26), a frightening ocean (cf. Mk 4: 35) and a symbol of purification (cf. Lk 7: 44; Jn 13: 1-11). The symbol of water is also found in the life of Christ in four places: the Jordan (cf. Mt 3: 11-17), Cana (cf. Jn 2: 1-12), Sichar (cf. Jn 4: 1-42) and Golgotha (cf. Jn 19: 30-37). The scene at the Jordan is heralded by John the Baptist's allusion to water: "As for me, I am baptizing you with water, for your repentance; but One is to come after me who is mightier than I, so that I am not worthy even to carry His shoes for Him; He will baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Mt 3: 11). These words testify to the moment of spiritual transformation from the ancient Judaic rites of purification to that brought about by Christ. For the Christian "baptismal water" signifies the initiating purification that obtains the forgiveness of sins in an ongoing conversion and renewal of heart which Jesus fulfills through the gift of the Spirit.

The Water of Cana

In the wedding feast at Cana (cf. Jn 2: 1-12) it is the "transformation" of water into wine necessary for the nuptial feast that is important. Christ transformed into the abundant wine of jubilation the water contained in stone vessels that was to be used in the purification and washing of the hands (cf. Jn 2: 6). The wine symbolizes the gift of messianic joy and salvation brought by Christ and that replaced the rites and laws of the Israelites, symbolized by the water. This first miracle of Christ designated the beginning of a new way of understanding the Christian experience of the faith – a qualitative leap – the belief in the person of Jesus, "the Bridegroom of mankind" who transforms the old into the new, the water into wine.