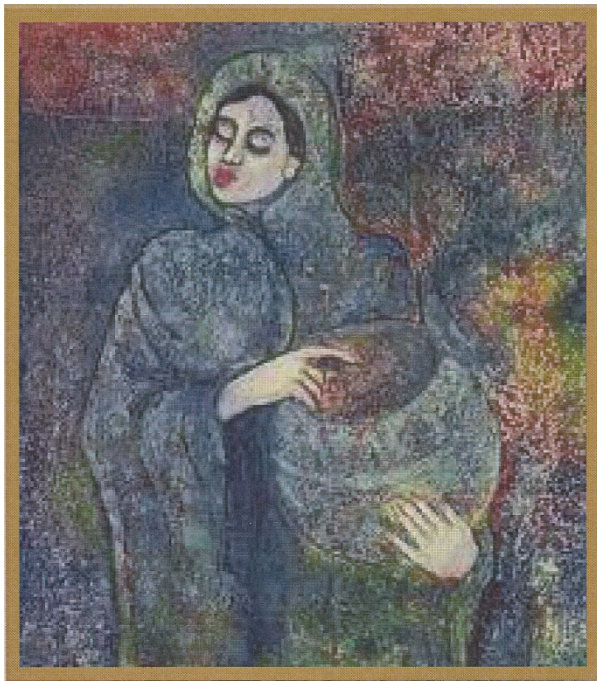


“Voice to the Voiceless” shared at SSS Spring Assembly

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“The Samaritan woman” and the “Woman at the well” – these are a couple of tags that we and scripture writers use to describe the woman who encountered Jesus in today’s gospel reading. I have wondered and still wonder: what was her name? Like many of her other sisters in the gospel stories – “the woman caught in adultery”, “the woman suffering from hemorrhage”, “the Syro-phoenician woman” – she has remained nameless through the centuries. In various forms of art she has been depicted – painted, sculpted, molded – this eternally nameless one!



Although she does not have name, every time I encounter her, as I do today, there is something that the weight of the centuries has never succeeded in suppressing: her voice! This woman may have been nameless, but she has not remained voiceless.

And guess who is surprised to see and hear her speaking! It is no surprise that in a culture that suppressed the voices of women that the disciples of Jesus would be surprised to hear him speaking with a Samaritan and a woman. This is not the first time that Jesus would give voice to a woman, much to the dismay and annoyance of the privileged ruling male class. Think of the woman caught in adultery, to her Jesus said: has no one condemned you? To the woman suffering from hemorrhage, Jesus said: did you touch me? To the woman with a sick daughter, Jesus said: what would you like me to do for you? Sisters, in simple terms, Jesus says to each one of them: speak, woman, speak!

And speak she does! She questions, challenges, implores and affirms Jesus. Listen to her voice:

- “How dare you ask me for a drink?”
- “Where is your rope for the well?”
- “Are you greater than our ancestors?”
- “Don’t ask me about ‘husbands’ – I have more important things to tell you!”
- “I see you are a prophet...”
- “I know the Messiah...”

Speaking of culture, the culture that silences women’s voices is not simply to be found in the distant past. In our day and age, it continues to happen. In our church it continues to happen. What or who really silences the voices of women? Is the daily grind of trying to seek a living out of limited resources and

limited opportunities decreed by others? Is it the patriarchal structures of power and authority that assign subservient and subordinate roles to women? Is it cultures that see women as children of a lesser god unable to speak and decide for themselves? Whatever it is, today's reading empowers us to break through and pull down those barriers that muffle our voices. I hear in today's story an invitation from Jesus: speak, woman speak!

And when I think and reflect on where we are as SSS community, I wonder: have we encountered Jesus at the well ourselves? Or does it really matter to us? Have we found our voices and engaged Jesus in a heart-to-heart conversation? Have we asked Jesus for something, like this woman asked Jesus for living water? Have we dialogued with Jesus? Are we still able to? What are we saying to Jesus? What are we asking of Jesus? And what is Jesus saying to us?

In some cultures, the well is a place of meeting where members of the community gather to draw this precious resource called water. But it is also a place of gossip and endless, pointless chatter. At the well, we, too, can meet and we can encounter the God of life, who gives us living water. At the well, we can meet, as a community to speak. What do we speak? Do our voices resemble the gossips and chatter of troubled and aimless women or are we genuinely encountering the God of life and speaking with voices that echo from the depths of our desires and passion, dreams and vision, pain and anguish?

When I think of it, ultimately, Jesus frees this woman; Jesus liberates her voice, so that by her proclamation of the good news, she would lead her entire community to the source of living water. "Come and see," she proclaims, "the one who told me everything I ever did – he's got to be the Messiah!"

Sisters, as we gather today, let us behold the well at the center of our lives as SSS; let us see the one who stands at the other side of the well; and let us enter into conversation with Jesus and with one another – with truth, with honesty, and with courage – that the God of living waters may free our voices to empower and lead one another to the well of life, the well of renewal, the well of love! Amen!