

3rd Sunday of Lent, readings for mass: Exodus 17.3-7; psalm 95; Romans 5.1-2,5-8; John 4.5-42

“Through Jesus Christ we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand (...). And hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts, through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (Romans 5.2,5)

I took my final vows here in Toronto 3 years ago. During the reception in the evening, the sisters of my community projected a wonderful slideshow with pictures of water streams or water sources. Waters in places I have lived in, and also in cities and villages where there are xavière communities. Here were beautiful pictures of the Seine river, in Paris; the Mediterranean sea in Marseille, and the font in la Pourraque in Provence; in Ivory Coast, the lagoon in Abidjan; a well in Ndjamena, Chad. I was delighted, and also surprised/embarrassed: did water really matter so much to me that my sisters would think of offering me that gift? Yes, I was trained as an environmental engineer, with a specialty in water resources engineering. I have worked as a professional in water. Somehow I did not feel my studies and my work connected me with the natural element: water. I did not feel that connection. I had the same feeling, when I was asked to prepare the reflection for today. Well it seems that people who know me expect that I can make connection with water... I was ready to take up the challenge. Let’s try to make a few connections here.

Where’s the water?

I have been and water engineer with the Ministry of the Environment of the Province of Ontario for the past 7 years. My work consists in assisting municipalities in the Province with their water projects. For example, I help municipalities meet compliance with laws and regulations: and plan for expenditures on water and wastewater infrastructure.

It’s an interesting job, and also a very “regular” kind of job: services are delivered to the municipalities for a fee, therefore quoting and invoicing the work is involved, I work in a regular open space office out in Mississauga, I report to a manager, there are team meetings with my co-workers, timeline to meet for projects, timesheets to complete, etc. I love this job. But I have to say, there is no water in sight. More often than not I am sitting in front of the keyboard of my computer, typing away, emails and calls... no water in sight, except at the tap of our kitchen sink.

Where is the water?

Things become different when I travel for work. I can’t say enough how I have loved going to deliver early morning workshops to staff at the water treatment plant in Thunder Bay... as I reach the plant, here is majestic lake Superior, wide and awesome.... In Parry Sound, I have had early morning meeting at the water treatment plant: I marvel at the sight of Lake Huron, in the bay of Parry Sound. From the water treatment plant in Petawawa I see the Ottawa River, large, curled there. The river connects me to the history of the place.

There are other waters that mark my life, outside of Ontario: the St Lawrence River in Montreal; Petit Codiac, Riviere Jaune, Riviere Bleue, Micmac, Kouchibouguac, Memramcook Nord, Memramcook Ouest, Scoudouc River, these names from New Brunswick sung by Zachary Richard also sing in me. They elicit a sense awe, and a sense of peace. They connect me with the history of the people. The water is out there, and I delight at the sight.

Where is the water?

The water also charts its way within me. At morning and evening prayer with my sisters in community we chant the psalms of the liturgy of the hours. Water runs throughout the text of the psalms. That prayer fashions me.

For example on Tuesday mornings I sing in psalm 144: "you draw me out of the mighty waters", and with all who are in pain in the world I praise God for God's saving hand, and I feel safe in God's hand, rescued from turmoil. "You draw me out of the mighty waters".

Or on Sunday evening in psalm 114: "When Israel came forth from Egypt (...) the sea fled at the sight, (...) the God of Jacob, who turns the rock into a pool, and flint into a spring of water": I savour the words: rock and pool; flint, and spring of water... they stay with me during the week...

And on Monday morning, in psalm 42: "Like the deer that yearns for running streams, so my soul is yearning, for you my God." Thanks to the psalm I become aware of this mystery, that running streams somehow are connected to my desire for God.

Where is the water?

The people in the wilderness asked for water. The rock is hard; the wilderness is inhospitable and frightening. In Sychar, the well is deep, it's the heat of the day. Water is hard to reach. I watch the scene, and I ponder. Just like the woman of Samaria, I may be tired, weary and worn out by the day's tasks. I may be looking for some kind of direction, for some kind of meaning. My life may sometimes appear as a succession of failed attempts for projects, unsatisfying relationships, half-baked truth, and dull ordinary life. Who will show me the path of life, I ask. Who will "proclaim all things to me"? Even before I think of turning to him, Jesus is there. I see him by the well, tired, and he asks of me, for a drink. He starts speaking to me, with me.

This is where the ways of the waters take me... The place where I meet Jesus. He tells me that he gives the living waters: "God's love, has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." In that place, I know I may receive the revelation of who Jesus is, and at the same moment the revelation of who I am for God. There, only there, I may be transformed.

Then I can probably endure the challenges of the wilderness and the questioning that sometimes burdens daily life, leading even to asking: "is the Lord with us?"; I can be thirsty like the deer and long for peace, for joy, for strength... I can put up with the daily chore of going to the well –or for that matter going to work in Mississauga... if only day in and day out I go to the core of the core of my heart, and pay attention, and listen - and put into practice what I hear. As I am being transformed, I believe I can take part in the transformation of the world. As I am being healed, I believe I may become a healing presence for others and for creation.

Water has its ways... for each of us the question may resonate: "Where is your water?"