

Homily of His Exc. Salvatore Pennacchio,
Apostolic Nuncio in Thailand, for the closing Eucharist
of AMOR XV
Samphran, October 21, 2009

Dear Sisters,

I am happy to be here among you today for the celebration of this thanksgiving and commissioning Eucharist at the conclusion of your meeting. I thank you for your invitation that shows your desire to work in unity with the universal Church and the Pope, whose humble representative I am.

The theme of your reflection in these past days was: “Jesus encounters the Syro-Phoenician woman: women religious of Asia-Oceania called to move beyond”. Actually, as you have written in your letter of invitation, the call to move beyond is the driving force of your organization. I quote it: “In our world beset by divisions and different forms of insecurities, AMOR continues to search to identify with “the material poor of Asia, but who are rich in spiritual and human values”, moving beyond gender, culture, race, or moving beyond boundaries (of wealth distribution, migration citizenship, generation gap) especially when human dignity is violated”.

While meditating on the Gospel that has just been proclaimed, I was wondering what could I share with you today in the context of your reflection and in light of God’s Word. A few thoughts come to my mind which I would like to offer for your meditation.

First of all we are certainly aware that it is not easy to “move beyond”. Where can one find the strength to fulfill the prophetic vocation that is part of your religious life? The celebration of the Eucharist reminds us that, without Christ, we can do nothing. He is the center of your life, because religious life is a call to share in the same life-style of Christ.

Around the altar we learn that to love our brothers and sisters with Jesus' love, to proclaim the Kingdom of God and make it present to them, demands the readiness to offer one's life together with Jesus. Salvation does not come from me, but from the love of God manifested in Christ. It is Jesus who offers salvation to the Samaritan woman in the Gospel. In meeting him, in the truth of his love for her, she has a personal experience of God's love for her. Only then can she 'move beyond' and proclaim what Jesus has done for her.

In our lives we can not identify with the poor in a Christian way unless we constantly meet Jesus and strive to become one with him. This unity is given to us as a gift of love in the Eucharist. The last plenary meeting of the FABC, speaking of the family, states: "There is no deeper communion of love and life than this – the sharing of Jesus' own Body and Blood, his whole life, with believers. His sacrificial love gives rise to a new community, a family of faith born in the Spirit" (60). "Through the Paschal Mystery sacramentalized in the Eucharist, families are empowered to rise from the daily trials, anxieties, discouragement, even hopelessness -- the many kinds of "death" that daily marital and family life is heir to. Certainly joy, hope, forgiveness, reconciliation, and strength for couples and their families come from the Eucharist" (114).

And this is very true not only for Christian families, but for every Christian and especially for religious communities as yours, my dear sisters. As the same document explains, a Eucharistic spirituality of self-emptying and self-giving love is necessary to give Christian witness to the world (115).

Let us move to the second idea. Speaking with the Samaritan woman at the well, entering into dialogue with her, Jesus moves beyond all the prejudices that existed between the Jews and the Samaritans. In this way he pushes the woman so that she too should move beyond.

Jesus' Words make her free not only from her prejudices, but also from her past and her way of thinking. Jesus' Word! How important it is in our life too to be capable of listening to Jesus! Spending time with his Word in meditation every day allows us to be little by little changed by him. Silent adoration in the presence of the Eucharist prepares room in us for Jesus' coming and for listening to him. If we never spend time with Him, how can he speak with us? If we are not silent, how can we hear his Word? Speaking to consecrated people last February 2, 2009, on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord and referring to St. Paul's experience, Pope Benedict XVI said: "This explains why he does not tire of urging us to behave in such a way that Christ's Word may dwell within us in its richness (cf. Col 3: 16). This brings to mind the invitation addressed to you in the recent Instruction on *The Service of Authority and Obedience*, to seek "every morning... a living and faithful contact with the Word which is proclaimed that day, meditating on it and holding it in [your] heart as a treasure, making of it the root of every action and the primary criterion of each choice".

Let us ask our Lord together with the Samaritan woman: "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty again!" (Jn 4:15). Jesus' Word will become in us a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.

This deep and constant relationship with Jesus, this never-ending dialogue with the Word, frees us from all our chains, from our own way of thinking, from our ties of this world. Christ will teach us God's ways and he will help us to walk new paths. It will become spontaneous to overcome all boundaries and acknowledge the equal dignity of every human being as beloved children of God. We will experience the freedom of the children of God. Christianity certainly empowers a social transformation, leading to the fulfillment of the Kingdom of Heaven.

However, we should never forget that the true root of any lasting social transformation is always the personal conversion to Christ of each member of the society.

So we can move to the last thought that I would like to share with you. Jesus, speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well, tells her the truth about her past without half terms, I would say in a shocking way. And the woman is so struck by that that later on she will say: “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!” (Jn 4:29). The truth about her past, what we can say was not so edifying, has made her free and even more apt to bring the Good News to the people that she meets, because she can now announce the salvation that she has experienced in her meeting with Christ. Jesus opened for her what really mattered in her life, and he uncovered the heavy burden that she tried to keep hidden. Removing this obstacle from her heart prepares her to acknowledge Jesus as a prophet and perhaps even as the Messiah (Jn 4:29). This is the experience she shares with the people she meets. Her witness leads many to Jesus, so that they can have their own experience with him: “Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony” (Jn 4:39).

In our life we need this liberating encounter with Christ, that assuming our past, purifying our hearts, prepares us for acknowledging him as our Savior. We are not above our brothers and sisters. We are not better than they are. If we have been called, if we have answered the call, and if we are still following Jesus today, it is because of God’s great mercy for us. He has changed our lives! Our witness can be credible only if we are capable of proclaiming the great things the Lord has done for us. As Pope Paul VI rightly noted, “modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses”.

Dear sisters, following the example of this Samaritan woman, let us become true witnesses to what God has done for us and for the people around us. Many will come to listen to us because, while a theory can always be rejected, no one can refuse a witness. We will give glory to God and offer the most precious gift we have to our brothers and sisters: Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. With humility and daring, let us bring to Christ the people to whom we are sent. May this encounter change their lives! Happy are we if one day they will tell us: "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world" (Jn 4:42).

May Mary, the humble servant of the Lord, the daring mother standing at the foot of the cross, lead your way! Following her example may you proclaim through your life: "The Mighty One has done great things for me and holy is his name... he has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty" (Lk 1:49, 52-53).

God bless you all!