

The Dominican theologian Brian Davies wrote an interesting article some years ago based on a lecture in which he argues that Thomas Aquinas can be deservedly described as an academic. I suspect most of us would not have thought otherwise. But he bases his argument on a concept of God as the end and means of any search for truth, and this is a truth that needs to be taught as much as discovered and a teacher is only a teacher in so far as others are taught or, in his own words,

I can talk my head off in a classroom. And I can wear my fingers out while writing on a blackboard. But it does not follow that I have therefore taught anyone anything. Teaching only occurs as learning takes place. It is a single activity, but it requires more than one person going through certain motions. Just as it takes two to tango, it takes two for there to be teaching.
(*New Blackfriars July/August 2002 p340*)

Today's gospel story is a wonderful instance of truth being taught and discovered through the interaction of two people. Jesus leads the Samaritan woman to the truth of her own situation before God, and does so in a way which shows her acceptability to God. And he does this by showing that, despite all her waywardness, she is acceptable to him. She is learning something about herself which she never knew before and learning something new about God. Jesus has no bucket and no need of one, for the water he gives is himself and his thirst is for her to drink from the same water. He leads her to this water by allowing her to taste of it, little by little, and so she acquires a taste for the whole truth which she finds to her surprise is not bitter but sweet. Brian Davies also goes on to say that a teacher must be virtuous – that is, a good person, a seeker after good – because truth resides in God – *is* God, one might say. So what Jesus has imparted to the woman is a sense of God's goodness and also her own essential goodness, too. She's good enough, indeed, to go off and tell others about *this man who has told me everything I ever did* and her quest for God continues as she asks herself as much as others, *I wonder if he is the Christ*.

So it does indeed take two to tango. A curious woman and a teacher steeped in God's goodness. So, for those who are students among us, which is all of us, continue to keep asking these difficult questions: *I wonder if he is the Christ. I wonder if God exists*. And for those among us who are teachers, which is all of us, be very grounded in God, that is, in goodness, before daring to lead another to the truth of God. In this sense, we have to identify ourselves both with the goodness of God and the sinfulness of the woman if we are to be as Jesus is to us.

Br John Mayhead
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour