

SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Gospel: John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now. Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

REFLECTION 1:

THE SIGN OF CANA

The miracle at the wedding of Cana is the first sign that Jesus performs in the Gospel of John. Just one jar holding 20 gallons of wine would have been plenty. But Jesus changed six jars of water into wine, creating 120 gallons. It was a sign of the Lord's great generosity towards an embarrassed couple. In those days, weddings were not one-day affairs; travelling any distance was arduous, so guests were expected to stay a few days at least. Sometimes the wedding celebration lasted a week if the wine held out. When Mary mentioned that the host was out of wine, she knew that Jesus could resolve the problem. Jesus seemed reluctant to reveal himself. But when they set the water jars before him, Jesus revealed his love for his mother and the immense love of God for his children. The wine was given in good measure, like grain that is packed down and overflowing.

The reason most Christians believe that Jesus' changing of water into wine at Cana in Galilee was his first miracle is because John tells us so. 'Jesus did this at the beginning of his signs' (John 2:11). This is John's first miracle and it sets the theme for his Gospel. John never refers to miracles as miracles; he always calls them 'signs'. We never dwell on the actual sign itself, but it points beyond itself to another thing, person or situation. His miracles are always pointing to something about Jesus to people who don't share John's insights, but is at the heart of the particular miracle.

Notice that Jesus isn't employing empty wine jugs, but he uses containers that never contained wine. They were the receptacles that held the water Jews would use for their ceremonial washings in ritual purification rites, like the water in our holy water fonts. It would seem that by this miracle John is symbolically showing that Jesus replaced the water of Judaism with the wine of Christianity. That's basically the theme of John's Gospel and it flows from the first sign Jesus employs.

Some of us remember the catchy song from the 1940s musical 'Annie Get Your Gun': "Anything you can do, I can do better!". Throughout his work John is constantly telling his community, "Anything that Judaism can do, Christianity can do better". Before Jesus, Judaism was the best, but after Jesus it is in second place. The Galilean Carpenter offers us more than Judaism ever could.

In John's narrative, Mary seems to misunderstand her Son's ministry, believing his special powers are to be used for the benefit of his family. So Jesus tells her 'My hour has not yet come'. For John, Jesus' hour revolves around the heart of his ministry – namely his dying and rising. He is not on earth to provide

advantages for his family members. Further, there is a deeper significance to Mary's participation in Jesus' first sign. As an example for all Christians, she changes from just looking at Jesus as someone who can provide us with the stuff we want, to someone who helps us to experience dying and rising with him. There's a lot of insight behind John's remark at the time of the Crucifixion 'From that hour he (The Beloved Disciple) took her into his home' (Jn. 19: 25).

Politicians on assuming office might ask the electorate 'Are you better off now than you were four years ago?' Our Sacred Author would have identified with such a question only he would have asked, 'Are you better off with faith in the risen Jesus than you were without that faith?' John weaves his entire Gospel around that question. He is convinced that what we had before, to have faith in Jesus, is better. When John told this story 70 years after the Resurrection, he was recalling what life with Jesus is like; and he said, wherever Jesus went and wherever he came into life, it is like changing water into wine. This story is John saying to us: 'If you want the new exhilaration, become a follower of Jesus Christ and there will become a change in your life like water turning into wine. The sign of Cana is not just an episode from Jesus' life recounting one day when he happened to be invited to a wedding. It is a revelation of the glory of Christ, which is the source and object of our faith, as well as an invitation to contemplate the glory of the Lord throughout Ordinary Time, which begins today.

REFLECTION 2: THE GOD WHO CELEBRATES

Imagine for a moment that you are invited to a wedding. You know the bride and groom, either may be related to you, but you have no idea who is coming to the reception in a nearby hotel. What a surprise awaits you when you discover that Pope Francis has also been invited. You are introduced to him and he greets you warmly with a smile and kind words.

In our Gospel today, a new God appears to us in the middle of a wedding and celebration. The prophet Isaiah in our first reading feels the urgency and importance to speak of the 'new' things the Lord has in store for his people - new name, a new covenant. Isaiah uses marriage symbolism, to speak of the tenderness and intimacy and affection of God's new relationship with his people. God is not a severe and despotic God, but rather the bridegroom and the friend who can love with tenderness and passion, who delights in the love of his people.

In taking up that idea, the Gospel of John presents not only Jesus' first miracle but also the first of his 'signs'. The 'signs' are very important to John and mention of them recurs throughout his Gospel. This event is very meaningful as we are told that 'Jesus and his disciples have also been invited to the wedding'. Or perhaps Jesus is the one who is inviting! He is inviting us to know him. You see, the God of Jesus doesn't make himself known to us in a church or on a mountain top surrounded by imposing majesty, but instead at a wedding and in the company of his friends. God is preparing his people for a celebration, a new alliance. And what is presented now as a symbol will be full reality when his 'hour' comes. This is the new relationship of God with his people and it is different from the previous one as water is from wine. The new wine of Vatican II!

John tells us that Jesus asks the servants to fill six stone jars for the Jewish rites of purification. From now on religion will no longer be based on the law and constant ablutions or the observance of rules and regulations under the fear of punishment and guilt. The presence of Jesus is the new 'Epiphany' (manifestation) of this new and different God – not a God of fear and punishment, distant from us and delighting in sacrifices. But instead a God who is close to us in the setting of a feast, sharing our joys and concerns. At the wedding, when they ran out of wine, the 'good wine' is served - the best image of the face of God. Religion will be joyful and festive because we share in God's joy. As Isaiah puts it 'As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you' (Is. 62:5). Through the Spirit we have entered into God's family by becoming God's children. God is building his church today in unity and diversity, because as Paul puts it in our second reading 'to each of us is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good'. Like the God in whom we believe, we as a community will not rest 'until her vindication shines out like the dawn' (Is. 62: 11).