

Second Sunday of Ordinary Time C - Celebrating Marriage at Cana

January 16, 2022.

Although the Christmas season is over and we are in the Ordinary Time of the year, this Sunday's Gospel reading (John 2:1-11) once more returns us to the Epiphany. There are actually three epiphanies of the Lord. The Orthodox and Byzantine Churches celebrate them all together on the same day. The Roman Catholic Church separates them. So we had the wise men two weeks ago, and the Baptism of the Lord last week. In the year C readings, we are now in the third Epiphany, the turning of water into wine at Cana. This is seen by the Church as an epiphany because it is the first time that Jesus Himself manifested His divinity to His disciples.

Jesus and his first followers, drawn from among the followers of John the Baptist, have returned to Galilee, where they are the guests at a wedding. Jesus' mother is clearly aware of her son's special gifts, and when the wine runs low, she asks him to help. Jesus responds with the words, "**My hour has not yet come.**" For us living in the Northern Hemisphere, December 21 marks the winter solstice, which means we are tilted as far away from the sun as possible, having the shortest hours of sunlight and the longest hours of darkness. Now is January, we begin to feel the new light and notice a new strength, a growing life in the light. **John the Evangelist has proclaimed that Jesus, "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world"** (John 1:9). Like the days after the winter solstice, the true light takes time to emerge and grow and increase in strength.

Today's first reading from Isaiah speaks of God's promise of fertility and abundance, using the image of marriage: ***You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married***" (Isaiah 62:4). The wedding at Cana embodies the image of fertility and new life prophesied in Isaiah, while the miracle of transforming water into wine expands the idea of new life to imagine a life in Christ, a life infused with the Holy Spirit. For Jesus' followers, the miracle at Cana is the first sign on the road to prepare a new way of being, a revelation of the Kingdom of God.

The gospel story about a miracle at a wedding celebration can lead us to a renewed life in Christ. We can better learn how to share and celebrate the unlimited gifts that God offers us, the joys of human community and the union we can have with God, one that will sustain us through our journey of faith. Just like the spiritual gifts St. Paul speaks of (1 Corinthians 12:1-11): gifts of wisdom, healing, working miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits. Christ came on earth to change people and make all things new. If we want to change for the better, we need to ask Christ to come and change the water of our lives, to bring greater understanding and make our lives better. We need to ask our mother Mary to bring our human needs into the mission of her Son. When we go to Jesus with open hearts and empty hands, he can touch us and make certain the wine of love and joy will always be part of our lives.

The wedding at Cana is more than just Jesus turning water into wine. It was the beginning of the hour, the time of the Lord's passion, death and resurrection. The changing of water into wine, the beginning of the hour, teaches us about sacrifice. Those marriages that seek the Lord as their centre are seeking to love as He loved, to love with a sacrificial love. All Christians are called to sacrificial love whether this love is expressed within a marriage or within the life of the committed single. The great gift of marriage is that the married are continually challenged with ways to love sacrificially. Occasions present themselves daily whether it is doing the shopping or laundry, changing the diapers, getting the child to soccer or dance, working harder to provide better living standard, taking the cars in for an oil change, or

simply, getting off the couch to play with the kids. All are expressions of sacrificial love which are the routine of marriage. All are ways of living the sacrament of marriage. The husband must put his wife before himself. The wife must put her husband before herself. The needs of their children must come before the needs of the parents. This is sacrificial love, expressed countless times in the daily routine of the Catholic family. In the New Testament, wedding metaphors are used to exemplify the relationship of God with the people of God. We are encouraged to better understand our relationship with the unseen God by examining the nature of love between two people in an ideal marriage. In this way, we can better know the love that God intends for a relationship with us as the very children of God. We are to examine the best kind of love in marriage and see the giving away of self in extravagance like the abundance of wine at Cana, as something that can lead to new possibilities that can produce in each of us a genuine transformation from the tendency toward human selfishness into gracious, loving Christ-likeness.

Most people spend many years in school preparing for their careers either by going to college, or take special courses. This is good. But the young need to spend time and energy preparing for their lives with Christ. We Catholics believe that the Lord is present in the celebration and in the living of the sacrament of marriage. Our "Pre-Marriage" preparation course is often referred to by many as "Pre-Cana program". The main purpose is to help the couple prepare for the sacrament, prepare for the Real Presence of the Lord in their marriage uniting His Love to their love for each other. Over the course, participants are to develop practical tools that will create a lifelong, happy marriage. For many of us, the "marriage preparation" actually begins many years before the bride and groom meet. The young adult who nurtures his or her relationship with Christ is preparing for a marriage centred on Christ. He, she, is in fact preparing for the sacrament of marriage. They pray for their future husband or wife, and pray that they recognize this person when they come into their lives. They look for someone with whom they can pray for the rest of their lives. They look for someone with whom they can celebrate life in every aspect of life, physical, emotional, and, particularly, spiritual. They must not choose someone based solely on that person's physical qualities. Yes, chemistry is important, but the physical must be united to emotional support, and, even more important, infinitely more important, to the ability to share the spiritual life. The vocation to the sacrament of marriage is the call to Christ through their husband or wife. Then, if so blessed, the vocation to the sacrament of marriage will flow through the natural result of their physical and spiritual love, their children, the love for Christ and each other, loving them back. As parents, they will seek new ways to guide their children to the Lord. At the same time, they will be strengthening the Kingdom of God by increasing the number of committed Catholics.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, today, as we remember the presence of the Lord at the wedding feast of Cana, let's pray that all married couples may celebrate the Presence of Christ in their families as places of communion and prayer, authentic schools of the Gospel and small domestic churches; never experience violence, rejection and division; and may all who have been hurt or scandalized find ready comfort and healing; make them more mindful of the sacredness and inviolability, and its beauty in God's plan. Amen.