

Second Sunday after Epiphany

Readings: Romans 12:6-16 and John 2:1-11

*Jesus performed this first of His signs in Cana of Galilee.
Thus did he reveal His glory
and His disciples believed in Him.*



On this second Sunday after Epiphany the Church continues the narratives of the manifestation of Jesus. Today's manifestation describes His first miracle which he wrought in Cana of Galilee, changing the water into wine. To understand what John is trying to teach us, we look at many layers of meaning in the story.

There is the most obvious level of meaning. A little family was celebrating a wedding. Mary, Jesus' mother, was helping out. She was well aware that since that Jesus had showed up with at least five of His disciples as extra guests, they were running out of wine. She advises Jesus about this. She simply says, "*They have no wine.*" Jesus apparently puts her down, "*Woman, what is it to me or to thee? My hour has not yet come.*" But Mary knew her son very well so she tells the waiters, "*Do whatever He tells you.*" And the miracle unfolded.

His hour had not yet come! In John's Gospel, Jesus' "hour" is the hour of His glorification. It is the "hour" of His passion, death and resurrection. This "hour" had not yet come. Then John uses a word to describe this event and he calls it, not a miracle, but a *sign*. A sign is something that points to something else. Therefore this miracle becomes a sign of Jesus' "hour" which had not yet arrived. That is how we are to understand it.

Jesus is beholden to His heavenly Father, not to His earthly mother. What we have before us is just a story of genuine neighborliness. People are in trouble; Mary intercedes; The miracle occurs. And they have about 150 gallons of wine! That's a lot of wine. (That's what a firkin means in case you were wondering what that strange word means.) It's not only wine, it's vintage wine. Estate bottled, if you like. It even tickles the palate of the person who was probably the groom's best man and he makes his comment about saving the choice wine until now.

We can learn from the story that we should be kind and neighborly. We should take care of one another as Jesus gave this example in the Gospel. We could go home with that idea and that would be fine. That's a good moral from the story, but John never writes anything that simple. He always has layers of meaning; a second level and sometimes even a third level of meaning. So John lets us reflect on the nuances of this Gospel. He wants us to do that because, as we do so, we delve into the mystery of who Jesus truly is as He manifests Himself in this epiphany.

The first level of meaning, if you will, in the very first verse of today's Gospel. *"On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee."* The third day! That is the day of the resurrection. *"And on the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures."* John is not just marking our calendars. He wants to point this sign to the great manifestation of Jesus' glory: His passion and death and resurrection, His *"hour."*

In John's story there are six jars of water used for ceremonial washing. According to Jewish purification rites they would wash their feet and hands and even had ritual washings after each course of the meal. So they used a lot of water. That's why there was so much available. Now there were six jars there. That number is significant. Six! For a Semite caught up in numerology, the number six means *imperfection*. For a Semite, a perfect number would be seven or twelve. But here it was six, in order to demonstrate here that Jesus came not to destroy the Law of the Prophets, but to bring them to perfection. Jesus would change the water of the Old Covenant into the wine of the New.

There were six days of creation. And then is added, *"On the seventh day, the Lord rested;"* not only to hallow the seventh day, but in order to show us that there is perfection in God's creation. Seven! Seven sacraments in our Church! That is not accidental. The imperfection of six stone water jars is there because the perfection that Jesus our Lord would bring to this earth in His glorification was yet to come.

Another level that John wants us to get to is that wine. His first miracle involved wine. Why is that? In all of the Scriptures wine is the symbol of joy and of life. Isaiah uses it as a description of the Messianic Age.

*"On this mountain the Lord of hosts will provide a rich fare.
Good choice food and good choice wine."*

The Messianic Age calls for the use of wine in this first miracle because the Messianic Age had now dawned in the person of Jesus. It was Jesus who came to bring us life and to bring us a joy *"which no man can take from [us],"* as he tells His disciples at the Last Supper. A symbol of that joy is the wine.

It all happened at a wedding feast. In the synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, the evangelists describe Jesus as the bridegroom. Jesus Himself appropriates the name. *"It is not proper,"* He says, *"to fast while the bridegroom is with you. But when He leaves, there will be plenty of time for fasting."* The Old Testament so often describes God as the bridegroom of His bride, Israel. It is appropriate that this first miracle happened at a wedding. Jesus our Lord is the bridegroom; the Church now is His bride.

St. Paul picks this theme up beautifully in His letter to the Ephesians in the fifth chapter when he writes,

*“Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church.
He gave Himself up for her to make her holy
purifying her in the bath of water by the power of the Word,
to present to Himself a glorious church,
holy and immaculate, without stain or wrinkle or anything of that sort.
Husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies.
He who loves his wife loves himself.
Observe that no one ever hates his own flesh.
No, he nourishes it and takes care of it
as Christ cares for the church
for we are the members of His body.”*

There is so much in the story. There is teaching about hospitality. But there is so much more. There is another level of meaning I think that John wants us to understand. from this story. It's simply this. Jesus took water and made it into wine. A poet describing the incident once wrote, *“The water looked at its God and blushed!”* A beautiful way to relate what happened; what a miracle it truly was.

This morning we witness another miracle. That miracle is the wine that becomes the precious blood of Christ. That is truly a miracle. John says that the disciples saw the water made wine and they believed. When you and I see the body and blood of the Lord on the altar, we too are called to believe. The disciples' response is to be our response as well.

Consider as well those simple words of Mary. *“Do whatever He tells you.”* Could there be a better word for any Christian than that? *“Do whatever Jesus tells you!”* Follow Jesus and miracles happen.

Jesus said at the Last Supper, *“I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until I drink it new in the Kingdom of My Father.”* As we all share the Eucharist this morning, receiving the body and blood of our Lord in Holy Communion, we remember that one day with the bridegroom, Christ our Lord, we will drink it new with Him in the Kingdom of *our* Father. AMEN

