

1.21.2024 Epiphany 3 (St. John 2:1-11)

A first century Jewish wedding feast was a week-long, joyful event that celebrated the marriage of the husband and wife, the union of their families, and the wedding feast would surely be seen by those in attendance as a foretaste of the great heavenly feast God will prepare for His people at the end of time. The prophet Isaiah described that Day with these words, “*On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And He will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that has spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of His people He will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, that He might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for Him; let us be glad and rejoice in His salvation*” (Isaiah 25:6-9).

A first century Jewish wedding feast was a time to celebrate the marriage of the husband and wife, and the union of their families, but more than that, it was a time *be glad and rejoice* as everyone in attendance looked forward to the Day when God Himself “*will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain*” (Revelation 21:4), when *all people*, the saved “*from every nation and tribe and people and tongue*” (Revelation 7:9) will commune with the Father at His Table.

In the prophet Isaiah’s description of the heavenly feast prepared by God for that Day, wine is identified as being an important aspect of the meal. Isaiah spoke not only of *rich food*, but of *a feast of well-aged wine... of aged wine well refined*, and throughout the Old Testament, wine is described as a symbol of joy, celebration, and abundance. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon instructed the people to “*Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart...*” (9:7). Later he stated, “*a feast is made for laughter, wine makes life merry...*” (10:19), and the psalmist described wine as that which “*gladdens human hearts*” (Psalm 104:15). Wine was an essential part of any feast, but in a wedding feast it was of the utmost importance.

When we look at a Jewish wedding feast as a symbol of the Day to come when the people of God will dine with Him at His Table, when we consider the heavenly significance of this earthly feast and the vital role of wine in that feast, we begin to understand just how serious the situation was at the wedding in Cana, when Mary came to Jesus and said, "*They have no wine*" (John 2:3). This earthly wedding feast was now lacking an essential part of what made it an accurate sign pointing every guest to the heavenly feast to come. *They have no wine*. There was no symbol of the joy, celebration, and abundance of heaven. The substance, which *makes life merry and gladdens human hearts*, had in this world, once again, run out, and I ask you, how often is this true in our own lives?

Consider our prayer list. These are people for whom we fervently pray, people we carry with us in our hearts and minds because in different ways, *they have no wine*. Addiction, illness, cancer, poverty, hunger, war, sorrow, suffering, and death, to use the words of Isaiah, are a "*covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that has spread over all nations*." The trials and sorrows of this world (John 16:33), that tribulation we all experience, can leave us, as the wedding in Cana, without wine - without that essential aspect of what makes this life a sign pointing each of us to the heavenly life to come. At times we ask, where is the symbol of joy, celebration, and abundance of heaven? Where is the substance that *makes life merry and gladdens human hearts*? For so many people, certainly for every one of us at one time or another, it would seem to have run out, and according to the Gospel text we read today (or the "good news" text we read today), that's when the miracle begins.

When things appeared to be at their worst, when this feast looked like it would be a complete disaster, the Blessed Virgin Mary, knowing that she couldn't fulfill this need, approached our Lord, who answered her request by turning ordinary water into extraordinary wine. Mary could do nothing on her own, and therefore she looked to the One who does for us what we cannot do for ourselves, and this celebration went from having *no wine*, to having *six water-pots of stone* filled with 120-180 gallons of *the best wine*. This wedding feast, that without wine, was no longer an accurate symbol of the heavenly feast to come, became, in the presence of our Lord and God, the most accurate reflection of that joyful heavenly feast. This wedding marked

the time and place of our Lord's first public miracle, and I would ask you to consider the thought that the miracle in Cana is the miracle our Savior Christ still performs today.

When we have no wine, when things appear to be at their worst, we must recognize the truth Mary reveals in this passage, the truth that, as creatures, we don't create - we receive. As we sing during the offertory: "*All things come of Thee, O Lord, and of Thine own have we given Thee.*" God is our Creator, our Sustainer, our Provider. We are creatures who receive "*every good gift and every perfect gift*" (James 1:17) from His generous, merciful hand, creatures who can do *nothing*, as Jesus said, Apart from Him (John 15:5). Too often, we have these thoughts of self-sufficiency which lead us to believe that by our own effort or hard work we can replenish the wine that has run out in our lives, but just like Mary couldn't provide the wine for the feast in Cana, we can't provide the joy, celebration, and abundance that is found only in God. God, and God alone, is the wine that *makes life merry and gladdens human hearts.*

"*They have no wine.*" Mary's statement at the wedding in Cana was the beginning of a miracle, a miracle Jesus still performs today in the lives of those who ask Him, those who, like Mary, don't rely on their own strength, but come to Him when they have no wine. "*Come unto Me,*" Jesus said, "*all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you*" (Matthew 11:28). I will refresh you. Jesus provides for us what we cannot provide for ourselves. When the wine has run out, He gives to us what no one else can give. This is the miracle of Cana, and we recognize that in the fact that when the servants were told to fill the water-pots, "*they filled them up to the brim*" (John 2:7), with water. Tasteless, odorless, colorless water was all they could give. It was our Lord who turned that ordinary water into a feast of extraordinary wine, and it is our Lord who, in our lives, turns "*mourning into dancing*" (Psalm 30:11), sorrow into joy, and death into life everlasting.