

Dcn. Jerry's Homily

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, January 16, 2022

The Wedding Feast at Cana is one of my favorite stories from John's Gospel. This Gospel is written from a different perspective than the Gospels from Matthew, Mark and Luke. The latter three Gospels, the Synoptic Gospels, each give various aspects of Christ's ministry with a different emphasis. Mark focuses on the immediacy of the ministry, Matthew on Christ fulfilling the messianic prophecies and Luke on Jesus as the healer. However, these Gospels are called synoptic because one can lay the three Gospels side by side in columnar fashion and the similarity in language and chronology suggest a common source.

John's Gospel is different in many ways. It focuses on Christ's relationship with the Father. It has only seven signs, or miracles. Although there is not always agreement as to which are the seven signs, there is agreement that today's Gospel, the Wedding Feast at Cana, is the first sign and the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

Because this is the first sign it is worthwhile to recap this Gospel. Jesus, His disciples and Mary are invited to a wedding and there is not enough wine. Jesus, encouraged by Mary, starts His public ministry by turning water into wine. Six stone jars, which are used in Jewish ceremonial rites to wash, are filled to the brim. Each jar held between twenty and thirty gallons of water. So Jesus made the equivalent of 640 to 960 bottles of wine. The number six for the number of stone jars is important in Jewish numerology because it represents imperfection.

If you are at a wedding, perhaps this is as far as the homily should go. If you are getting married, invite Jesus and Mary into your marriage. You will be blessed with an abundance of grace. Jesus had not yet begun His public ministry, so it is not like the couple knew that they invited the Son of God. The couple was gracious, hospitable and trusting. Perhaps they were a little naive with the amount of wine they provided, but if they were, they erred on the side of inviting people not by being miserly.

We also have the last words of Mary recorded in Scripture, "Do whatever He tells you." Good advice for the wait staff and great advice for each of us.

One of the wonderful things about John's Gospel is that it is like an onion; there is always another layer to peel back. A reflection in the Liturgy of the Hours on this Gospel made me realize that there is at least one additional layer in the Wedding Feast of Cana. Jesus took a jar used for ceremonial washing and turned the water into wine, which redeemed the Sacrament of Marriage filling it with grace...filling it with new life. The type of stone used in the jar must have been hard, impervious to leaking. The stone must have been like our stony hearts, hard to penetrate.

These water jars were for ceremonial washing. Ceremonial washing in the Jewish law was complicated. In some cases it referred to a ritual cleaning of the body and in some ways it referred to ritual sin offering. But in no case was it an act that actually absolved sin. In John's Gospel, Jesus's public ministry begins with Jesus using ceremonial jars to convert water into wine, but how does His public ministry end? It ends with the Crucifixion. John's Gospel often has parallel images at the beginning and end of an event. John does this with the entire public ministry of Christ.

In each of the Synoptic Gospels the Crucifixion has unique details, but there are certain common themes. For instance, when Christ dies the Centurion says something like "Truly He is the Son of God". Only in John do we have the Roman soldier, sometimes identified as St. Longinus, who pierced Christ's side. Only in John's Gospel Longinus had the opportunity to be covered with Christ's blood and water as he pierced the side, and Longinus was never the same. He was overtaken by God's grace. The spilling of the blood and wine witnessed not only Jesus's death, but also his Divine Mercy.

Longinus was real, but he is also a symbol for each of us. Christ's death is our eternal salvation. We recognize that Holy Thursday through the first Mass on Easter is one continuous act. At the beginning of His public ministry Christ converts water into wine. At the end of His public ministry, He converts wine into His Precious Blood. And then at His death, and as proof of His death, He spills forth blood and water from the wound at the side of His heart to show that it is complete, that it is finished, that we are saved.

Steve Ray suggests that Christ became the seventh vessel at the Crucifixion, completing the imperfect number of six jars to the perfect number of seven. From the beginning of Christ's public ministry, His transformation of water into wine was a type and that type would be fulfilled with our redemption through the Eucharist and His spilling of his water and blood at the Crucifixion. He ends His public ministry with Divine Mercy.

Reflect on today's Gospel with amazement. Christ redeems the sacrament of marriage. He begins to reveal that He will save us through self sacrifice, not as a triumphal earthly king in an earthly battle.

And then there is Mary. She speaks her last words in the Gospel after interceding with her Son for Him to help the couple. Do whatever He tells you. Then at the Crucifixion, just before Christ dies she, remaining silent, is given by Christ to the disciple that He loves. That would be you, and you, and you... That would be all of us.

Do whatever He tells you. Remember to ask His mother, now our Heavenly mother, to intercede for us and all will be well and aligned with the plan of our loving God. There is no need to be anxious; it is all in His hands.

God bless you.