

## **Second Sunday of the Year, January 17, 2016**

Isaiah 62:1-5; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; John 2:1-11

Today we begin the ordinary season of the year. Today's readings tell us about the identity of Jesus, who he is and what his mission is. We need to know who Jesus is and understand his mission if we want to be his true disciples. We respond to God's love through lives that encourage forgiveness and reconciliation. The readings of today reveal to us that the Lord God rejoices in the Church that has been instituted by Jesus in the Father through the Holy Spirit. God is generous to his children and he rejoices in them. In the joyful hymn of Isaiah we see how God prepares for his remnant people, the ones who had remained faithful to him, good gifts, and more particularly his own presence. God and his people will be joined in the New Covenant. Paul in the second reading tells us that all gifts come from God but with a purpose so that we may proclaim his glory in his kingdom. These gifts may be diverse but they all proclaim God's own glory. The Gospel presents to us the first miracle performed by Jesus at a wedding. A wedding is a time of abundance and celebration. From the food and wine that are served, to the music and dancing that follow, weddings overflow with goodness of life. At a deeper level weddings speak about love, compassion and unity. Wedding feast Cana is a sign of God's love and compassion. Here Jesus takes care of the family who is about to be pushed into a state of embarrassment. At the same time he accepts the word of Mary to do a good act and present the family things in abundance. The abundance of the wedding is a taste of what God provides for us at the Eucharistic table.

In the first reading gives us the celebration of Joy over the restoration of relationship between God and his people. Years of exile had made people realise their foolishness and now they consider it a privilege to serve the Lord God. God comes to them as a special gift. God had remained silent for a long period of time because of the sins of His disobedient children. Now the people will be obedient and trustful to God who is their saviour. The reading begins with God breaking the long silence measured by years of exile following the collapse of the kingdom. During that time pride and arrogance lost their hold on the people. Now they are ready to accept God's plan for them. Israel is now given the royal status and the nation shines like the glorious crown, royal diadem in God's hands. God honours Israel with the new name, my beloved, my espoused one. They are now God's people. This wonderful transformation is not for the benefit of Israel alone. All the other nations shall benefit from it. They will see Jerusalem as the beacon of light

leading them all out of the darkness. Israel will be their guide. Indeed, the kings and rulers of every nation have seen the glory of Jerusalem.

In the second reading of today Paul enumerates the gifts the Christian Community has received. These gifts are a gratuitous present that has come to each from the almighty. The people of Corinth believed that whatever gift they had, including the spiritual, were due to their own merits. Paul says that diverse though these gifts are, they all come from the one God. All of us have our distinct abilities. We are called upon to use them to complement one another, for the good of the whole community, for building up God's Kingdom on earth. Paul lists nine gifts, but the charisms are not limited to nine. Christians receive whatever gifts necessary to fulfil their mission in life. The spiritual manifestations fall into three categories. These are the gifts, the ministries and the activities. The gifts are attributed to the Holy Spirit who has been sent by the Lord Jesus and the Father. The ministries are attributed to the Lord Jesus, who was sent as God incarnated to minister and to serve. The activities are attributed to God the Father who is the source of all being and activity. Thus the Trinity is involved in bestowing the spiritual gifts. The Father is the source of all the gifts. The Son is reflected in different forms of service. The Spirit is the person who distributes these gifts in the Community.

The story of the marriage feast at Cana we heard in today's Gospel is narrated by St John only. The event had made a deep impression on him as it happened only a few days after he and four disciples had decided to follow Christ. At this wedding he witnessed the first miracle worked by the Lord which must have impressed him a great deal. It is possible too that at the time he was writing the Gospel several stories about Jesus were in circulation but John chooses to emphasise this unique miracle as a special and the first sign. Very probably Mary was a relative or a close friend of the family and she shows deep interest in the needs and even shortcomings of the family. She even seems to have some authority in the house that she gives orders to servants. Here Jesus anticipates the hour of working the miracle on the request of his mother. Above all we are convinced by the goodness and kindness of God which is manifested in Jesus through this special sign.

Today's Gospel passage reveals to us one of the events that came to pass to manifest to us that the promise of God the Father was being fulfilled in the fullness of time. In the Gospel we see Jesus, his mother and his disciples at a wedding. And it is not the religious ceremony but a wedding party. Jewish weddings of those days could last a week. This was a time of grand celebration and Jesus and Mary along with the disciples were part of it. The message today is very clear: Jesus brings joy and he shares in the joys of others. He wants that our religion is meant

to be a joy-filled experience. The German philosopher Nietzsche once said: "If Christians want me to believe in their religion, they will have to look as if they are saved." Christian joy is a sign of being fully alive. St. Irenaeus says "The glory of God is a person who is fully alive." Today's story is indeed a great revelation of God's presence and activity in our midst. We see God revealing himself again in what Jesus does in this wedding scene. He worked this first miracle in order to give a temporal favour, an earthly gift to save a newly married groom from embarrassment. It had the other effects to convince the recent disciples that he is the chosen messiah and also the efficacy of the intercession of Mary on our behalf. The action of Jesus turning water into wine is the first of the seven signs that Jesus performed and recorded in the Gospel of John. On the surface signs appear to be miracles but John presents them with a particular purpose. As signs these miracles have a strong symbolic significance that tells us about Jesus and also his messianic work. Each miracle reveals the messianic sign of Jesus the messiah who is the full revelation of God to us. He is word that has become flesh for the sake of humanity. John never speaks of these signs as Jesus' 'miracles'. He prefers to call them 'signs', pointing to God's power and love at work in Jesus. Sign is generally a thing that points to or interprets a new idea or vision. In the wedding feast of Cana, the sign is that Jesus turns the water in six large stone jars used for Jewish purification rites, into very good wine. Here we have Jesus who saves the people from embarrassment and at the same time listens to Mary and performs the miracle for a humble poor family. This miracle points to the ultimate eternal messianic banquet. Jesus brings all to participate in the eternal banquet.

Secondly, Jesus tells his mother that his hour has not yet come. We the readers here are presented with a scene where Jesus attends a marriage function together with his disciples. During the celebration an unexpected crisis has come up that is in the feast when all things are going on right, the family has run short of wine that had to be served to the guests. This was quite shameful for the host. Mary on her own notices this and gets Jesus involved into the situation. She urges him to do something special for them and avoid possible embarrassment. There is the indication that Mary was already aware of his power. It is also possible that she was sharing a human concern as she was a person as sensitive to the difficulties of others as we see at the visitation. Jesus responds to her in a divine way by giving them plenty of wine necessary for the banquet. The water, when poured out, turns out to be wine, not just ordinary wine but of the highest quality. This really, shocked the steward at the wedding feast. It is normal, he says, to serve a second-rate wine when people's taste buds are blunted by much drinking. "But you have kept the best wine until now."

Jesus accedes to his mother's wishes but not just to prevent an embarrassing crisis. He uses this occasion to reveal something about himself and his mission. He is the Messiah and has a mission to fulfil of proclaiming the Kingdom of God. The water in the stone jars is changed into wine, and the miracle that Jesus does is not really visible. There is now enough wine to accommodate the people at the wedding banquet. Except for the servant and perhaps the disciples no one is aware of it. This wine symbolises the New Way that Jesus is introducing, far better than what had gone before. And there was so much of this new wine available and of excellent quality. It represents the generosity and liberality of God. Of course, it is the divine Power of Jesus the Son of God that will produce the miracle and change water into wine. But this divine Power wants to act in response to prayer: Mary believes that her Son is able to perform a miracle and so she asks him to do so, simply by telling him that the wedding guests did not have any more wine. Thereafter, each time Jesus performs a miracle, the faith and prayer of man will have first invited the Power of God to manifest itself through an exemption from the laws of nature - that is, through a miracle.

His mother told the servants to do whatever he tells them to do. The servants associated themselves to the faith of Mary through their obedience to the commands of Christ. John tells us that there were six stone jars were standing for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus asked them to fill the jars with water. The servants obeyed him and they filled them up to the brim. He said to them to draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast. In order for Jesus to perform his first miracle, Mary asked her Son to act and she reiterated to him all her faith. Mary is the first among all believers and her faith is unlimited. Being totally united with her son she was aware that he will not refuse her request. Through her deep faith she collaborates in the saving work of her son. She will be there with the church throughout. Her faith had its effect on the disciples and the seed of faith was placed in their hearts. Mary will be there too, in the Cenacle, on that day of the first Pentecost! Mary will have prayed with them in order that the Power of the Almighty, who had already come upon her on the day of the Annunciation, might pour itself upon the disciples of her Son and allow them to perform their own first miracles. Truly, the disciples of the Lord believed in him and came to the aid of Mary so that, by Her and with Her, the Church would be born and see the light of day, in order that it might ceaselessly grow until the fullness of time.

The miracle of today is to reveal a God in Jesus who is so generous that he sometimes scares us by his outgoing love. His generosity is over whelming and is sometimes it is difficult for us to comprehend. And all this happens in the context

of a wedding banquet. In the New Testament Church, the Christian community is the Bride of Christ. In the Letter to the Ephesians this "marriage" is linked to human marriage, of which it is a model. Jesus' followers are called upon to experience his generosity and the Gospel of John tells us that they began to believe through the sign he performed in front of them. We see here the power and majesty of Jesus. He performs the miracle for them and takes care of the chosen disciples. He has told us to ask and we shall receive. This is certain that he will always answer our prayer. The kind act of Jesus tells us that he is involved with our entire life and not spiritual life alone. It also tells us that it becomes easier when we approach him through Mary our Mother.

The Eucharist is a sign of God's constant presence where he makes us generous with his love, and strengthens our love so that it can become our real paschal meal. Let us make every Sunday Eucharist a special meal to share with one another as Jesus did. Let it bring to us a sense of togetherness with those around us or strangers who happen to be present with us. Finally, we know that Mary was there present at the wedding of Cana. Her intervention saved the day. Her words to the servants are still highly meaningful for us: "Do whatever he tells you." Mary here really represents the Church and it is through the Church that Christ comes into our lives and through the Church that we go to him. Much more, it is about living as a Christian today and every day. Let us reflect upon our active involvement in the Body of Christ and pray that by the grace of God, we may always persevere in our living faith as shining lights.

One night a man came to our house and told me, "There is a family with eight children. They have not eaten for days," I took some food and I went. When I finally came to the family, I saw the faces of those little children disfigured by hunger. There was no sorrow or sadness in their faces, just the deep pain of hunger. I gave the rice to the mother. She divided it in two, and went out, carrying half the rice with her. When she came back, I asked her, "Where did you go?" She gave me this simple answer, "To my neighbours-they are hungry also." I was not surprised that she gave—because poor people are generous. But I was surprised that she knew they were hungry. As a rule, when we are suffering, we are so focused on ourselves we have no time for others.

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