

Father O'Connor's Homily for 19 January 2025
Second Sunday in Ordinary Time-C

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

Among the most noteworthy of all the Gospel stories is the Wedding Feast at Cana. It was there that Jesus miraculously changed water into wine, and there that He revealed His divinity for the first time. This wedding is only recorded in Saint John's Gospel and it was written some 60 years after Jesus' Resurrection from the dead.

The very richness of John's Gospel presents those who would study it, and those who would preach on it, with a problem. Always there are two things. There is "a simple surface story" that anyone can understand and re-tell. And there is also "a wealth of deeper meaning" for those who have the eagerness to search and the eyes to see and the mind to understand. Let us look at this Gospel passage in both ways: "the surface story" and "the deeper meaning."

At Cana in Galilee, during what was expected to be an ordinary Jewish wedding, Jesus and His Mother are at the center of a heavenly-motivated event that reveals the course of salvation history.

The Gospel begins, "There was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the Mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and His disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short..." Why did the wine run short? The Gospel does not tell us, but perhaps some other "uninvited" followers of Jesus had "crashed" the party. [That is one explanation of why the wine ran out.]

Why did Mary appear to have so much authority at this wedding? Perhaps Mary knew the bride and groom or their parents and was helping with the wedding details, trying to ensure that no problems arose. No one there, except for Mary and the disciples, would have had any idea that Jesus was more than a carpenter-turned-rabbi. And there was no special devotion to Mary then, except from her Son. This would all begin to change during this wedding celebration.

We might wonder why John did not simply call this story "the Miracle at Cana," rather than "the Wedding at Cana," because a miracle is at the center of this Gospel account. But the fact that Jesus was there tells us of the importance He holds for the God-given institution of marriage. Jesus blessed the Cana wedding couple, and His presence would result in the sacred covenant of marriage being raised to being a sacrament in His Church.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says: “The Church attaches great importance to Jesus’ presence at the wedding at Cana. She sees in it the confirmation of the goodness of marriage and the proclamation that thenceforth marriage will be an efficacious sign of Christ’s presence” [#1613].

Running out of wine at a wedding reception would have been then – and now – humiliating for any bride and groom. Pope Francis once remarked, “Imagine ending the wedding feast drinking tea. It would have been an embarrassment” [spoken at a General Audience in June 2016].

Mary seems to be the first to notice the problem and tells Jesus, “They have no wine.” This does not come across as a simple observation but as a firm directive from a Mother to her Son. She clearly expects Him to come up with a solution. Perhaps there was a pause here, with a knowing look between them, before Jesus responds, “Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come.”

Simply, He is saying, “Mother, if you are expecting some sort of miracle, it can’t be right now. It is not yet the time for me to reveal my divinity.”

But Mary pretty much ignores Jesus’ response and tells the wine servers, “Do whatever He tells you.” Then Jesus appears to have an inspired change of heart and turns the water into wine.

Mary has complete confidence in Jesus. She did not know what Jesus was going to do, but she was sure that He would do the right thing. Mary will become the perfect intercessor for all of humankind. And fortunately for us, we see that Jesus never denies her.

Jesus calls her “Woman.” It is not a disrespectful word, but it does seem unusual that Jesus would call His Mother by such a name. [Remember that in John’s Gospel there is “the surface meaning” and then “the deeper meaning.”] With the term “woman,” Jesus is referring to her as the universal woman, the New Eve. She will become known as Our Blessed Mother, the Mother of us all. Here at Cana, her esteemed motherly role among Christians was instituted, a role that will be confirmed from the cross when Jesus says to her, “Woman, behold your son.” And to John, “Behold, your Mother.”

Jesus had said to Mary, “My hour has not yet come.” But now, at His Mother’s insistence, Jesus began His public life as the Messiah during a country wedding at Cana in Galilee.

Regarding the “hour” to which Jesus refers, Archbishop Fulton Sheen writes: “He was implying that a miracle worked as a sign of His divinity would be the beginning of His death. The moment He showed Himself before men as the Son

of God, He would draw down upon Himself their hatred. For evil can tolerate mediocrity, but not supreme goodness.... He was telling His Mother that she was virtually pronouncing a sentence of death over Him [“Life of Christ,” McGraw Hill, 1958].

“Do whatever He tells you.” These are the last words of Mary that are recorded in the Scriptures.

“Our Lady always takes us to Jesus. Call upon Our Lady and she will do what she did at Cana: ‘Do whatever He tells you!’ She was the first person to act in the name of Jesus” [Pope Francis, morning meditation at Domus Sanctae Marthae, 5 April 2013].

In the preface of the book, “As Jesus Taught us: The Prayer of Pilgrims of Hope,” [2024], Pope Francis offered this reflection on prayer to Mary:

“I also have great trust in the Madonna. I always pray the rosary. I like to feel her close because she is a mother and she guides us.

“There is a very beautiful story, which is of course a legend, but tells us how Our Lady rescues everyone. It is the story of Our Lady of Thieves, protector of robbers. They steal, but because they pray to her, when one of them dies, Our Lady, who is at the window of heaven, gestures for him to hide. She tells him not to go to Peter, who won’t let him in. But in the evening, she opens the window of Paradise and lets him in from there.

“I like this: Our Lady is the one who lets you in through the window. It is almost like smuggling. Just like at Cana. The Lord did not have the freedom to say no. She is like this with her Son. It is like this: pleading omnipotence.”

At the wedding feast, there were six water jars sitting nearby, used for Jewish ritual washings. Jesus tells the servers, “Fill the jars with water.” So they were filled “to the brim.” [John mentions this point to make it clear that nothing else but water was put into them.] The servers do so without hesitation, and the water miraculously turns to wine. Jesus uses an ordinary element – water – to work the miracle. Through His will, the water becomes wine – and not just any wine, but an excellent wine in an abundant amount.

Each of the six jars held 20 to 30 gallons of water, so there was as much as 180 gallons of wine. Someone figured out that such an amount would equal about 900 bottles of wine. Now that is a lot of wine – but then God likes to respond with excellence and abundance, because He is God after all.

This miracle prefigures the miracle that takes place at every Mass. At Cana, through a miracle, the water becomes wine. At Mass, through the miracle of the consecration, the wine becomes the Blood of Christ. The connection here is clear.

The miracle at Cana is the first of several miracles that John describes in His Gospel. But John does not refer to these acts as miracles, but rather as signs – signs of Christ’s divinity.

In all of his Gospel, John never wrote an unnecessary or an insignificant detail. Everything means something and everything points beyond. Always there are two things. There is “a simple surface story” that anyone can understand and re-tell: Jesus miraculously changed water into wine. And there is also “a wealth of deeper meaning” for those who have the eagerness to search and the eye to see and the mind to understand. What is “the deeper meaning” of this Wedding Feast at Cana?

Jesus changed the water in six stone jars into wine: up to 180 gallons of excellent wine. What John is teaching us is that when the grace of Jesus comes to us, there is more than enough for everyone. No wedding party on earth could drink 180 gallons of wine. No need on earth can exhaust the grace of Christ. There is a glorious superabundance for everybody.

With “a deeper meaning” in mind, John is teaching not of something Jesus did once and never again. But of something which He is forever doing, and continues to do today.

John wants us to see that whenever Jesus comes into our lives, He brings about a transformation which is like turning water into wine.

Remember that John was writing 60 years after Jesus rose from the dead. For 60 years, John thought and meditated and remembered, until he saw meaning and significances that he had not seen earlier on. When John re-told the miracle that he witnessed at that Wedding Feast at Cana, he was remembering what life with Jesus was like. And he was teaching us that, “Wherever Jesus went, and whenever He came into someone’s life, it was like water being turned into wine.”

This Gospel account is John saying to us today: “If you want this new way of life, live fully as a disciple of Jesus Christ, and open your heart to Him so that He can fill it “to the brim” with His transforming love. And there will come a graced change in your life which will be like plain water being turned into excellent and abundant wine.”

“Do whatever He tells you.” These words are the legacy that Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother too, hands down to us, her beloved children, today.