

THE WEDDING AT CANA: 2ND SUNDAY C

Children are still learning nursery rhymes such as *Baa Baa Black Sheep*, *Humpty Dumpty*, *Ring a Ring of Roses*, *Oranges and Lemons*, and *Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary*. But what they originally meant is different from what they seem to mean today. They were symbols and code language for what people were there and then experiencing. So too St John's story of Jesus changing water into wine at a wedding is brim-full of symbolic meanings, meanings beyond the bare facts. Its overall meaning is summed up in the last sentence of the story: '*This was the first of the signs given by Jesus ... He let his glory be seen, and his disciples believed in him*' (v.11). Having been shown as Son of God and Saviour of the world to the wise men at Bethlehem, to his own people at his baptism, now on this third occasion at Cana in Galilee it's to his first disciples.

In telling the story, we need to include John's first four words of introduction. The gospel writer says: '*ON THE THIRD DAY, there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee.*' In the Bible big things, great things happen on the third day, and above all the resurrection of Jesus. So at the beginning of his gospel, John anticipates its climax.

John's next words '*THERE WAS A WEDDING*' stir up rich associations. In both Judaism and early Christianity marriage was a rich metaphor to speak of the union between God and the people of Israel (as in our First Reading today), the union between God and an individual, and the union between Jesus and the Church as his bride. To this day religious Sisters wear a silver ring to show their spiritual marriage to Jesus as their beloved bridegroom, the love of their lives.

Moreover, in peasant life at the time of Jesus, weddings were an exciting break, a reprieve from what has been labelled '*the terrible everyday*'. Life was tough for peasants, and their daily diet was basic and meagre. It seldom included meat or poultry, which required killing one of their few animals. But a wedding worked like magic. It brought rest from hard relentless labour, and enjoyment of abundant amounts of food and drink, along with music and dancing. These associations help us identify the point John is implying. The whole story of Jesus is a wedding, a wedding at which the wine never runs out, and at which the best wine is saved till last. Moreover wherever Jesus goes, including so often to meals, the joy breaks out. He's experienced as '*good news*', as the good news of God's lavish, gracious, and everlasting love. So his presence is a source of joy. On this occasion the production by Jesus of so much new wine (no less than 120 gallons) of outstanding quality represents the abundance of God's gifts, which the prophets promised would arrive with the Messiah (cf. Amos 9:13; Hos 2:24; Joel 3:18; Is 25:6).

It's significant too that at this manifestation of his glory and greatness, '*the mother of Jesus was there*' (v.1.), just as she will be there again at the cross (Jn 19:25). In John's understanding Jesus is glorified on that cross, and the marriage union between God and his people is revived. In both places, Mary is there as the new Eve, the woman described in the Book of Genesis as '*the mother of all that live*' (3:20). Here at Cana, when '*the wine provided for the wedding was all finished*' (v.3) she feels a mother's compassion for the embarrassed bride and groom. Even when her son is slow to act, Mary's strong faith and trust do not

waver that he can and will fix things. So she says quietly to the waiters: 'Do whatever he tells you' (v.5).

In telling us his story of the wedding at Cana in Galilee, what's the main point that John the story-teller is making? I suggest that if and when we accept the invitation of Jesus to let him become our friend, our best friend always at our side, our life changes. It's like water being turned into wine. Without Jesus life tends to be dull, stale, flat and insipid – never fulfilled. But with him life becomes colourful, sparkling and exciting, even an exhilarating adventure. This is what St Paul keeps experiencing, even in situations of difficulty, opposition, and struggle. 'The life I now live in the flesh,' he writes, 'I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal 2:20).

Australian Jesuit theologian, Gerald O'Collins, has written about friendship with Jesus in a particularly eloquent and appealing way:

The truth is that we all have hungry hearts. We want to escape from all that is deadly, and find a life that is fuller and more satisfying. My faith and my personal experience tell me where to look. Look for Jesus. Welcome Jesus and you will be welcoming someone who gives us real life, the fullness of life. He is the Life-giver, the supreme Life-giver. ...If we open our arms to Jesus and let him into our little world, we will live life, the only life that truly fills our hearts and will continue forever. Modern advertising can offer products that provide passing relief for our hungry hearts, and make life for a time a little bit sweeter and richer. But those products can never fully satisfy our hungry hearts. Only Jesus can do that. ...Real life does not come by taking it for ourselves, but by receiving it from Jesus and sharing it with others. Only Jesus is the supreme Life-giver, the utterly satisfying Life-giver, who offers us life, now and forever. So, live life. Welcome Jesus. (Jesus: A Portrait, p.75).

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