

Homily – 2nd p.a. (C) 2019

“He let his glory be seen, and his disciples believed in him.”

✠ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

When I am invited to say grace at some jolly occasion, I occasionally use the following prayer:

“Eternal Father, Lord Divine, whose Son turned water into wine, O pray forgive those foolish men who want to turn it back again.”

As you can imagine, I am delighted to preach on this Gospel. Here we see an extraordinary scene as Jesus simply responds to a human need at the gentle prompting of his mother. But it's an unusual Gospel in that Jesus is not shown responding to a grave human need – he is not healing someone with leprosy, or someone who is blind – and he is not directly asked to do what he does. The dialogue between him and Our Lady is very true to life – it's how two people who know each other speak. Their reported conversation is full of assumptions and things that are not said because they don't need to be said. Listen again to the sequence of words, it's very brief, and I'll cheat and read it in a literal translation of the Greek:

“Wine they have not.”

“What to me and to thee, O woman? Not yet is come the hour of me.”

“Whatever he tells you, do.”

Is anyone apart from Mike thinking Yoda in Star Wars? Well, I gave you that version to show that a lot happens in very few words. Our Lady does not directly ask Jesus to provide wine. Jesus replies using a Hebraic expression implying refusal – we would say “It's nothing to do with us.” He also adds one of the words that will become charged with meaning in the course of our reading of St John's Gospel, the word ‘hour’. My hour is not yet come. And yet Our Lady turns with great confidence to the servants and tells them to do whatever Jesus says. This is a primary example of faith in the Gospel, and Our Lady's expression of faith precedes the first of Jesus' signs as recounted by John. Faith comes first, and then the granting of the request, the outpouring of grace. But there has been no request, except, of course, in the unsaid, unspoken part of the interaction between mother and son. So, why here at Cana, and why at this wedding feast does the presence of Jesus manifest itself? For we are dealing with ‘manifestation’ - it is no accident that the Church interrupts the

reading of Luke's gospel on Sundays this year to give us this passage of John just after we have celebrated the Epiphany. Wine is a powerful symbol in the Bible. In the Old Testament the presence of abundant wine is a sign of God's restored favour, or of the triumphant, fulfilling endtime: Here's an example from Amos:

*'The days are coming now - it is the Lord who speaks - when harvest will follow directly after ploughing, the treading of grapes soon after sowing, when the mountains will run with new wine and the hills all flow with it. I mean to restore the fortunes of my people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them, plant vineyards and drink their wine, dig gardens and eat their produce.'*

So – the appearance of new wine in what was becoming a desperately dry wedding is itself a sign, saying, yes, God's promises are now to be fulfilled as you have heard. Jesus' ministry begins under the sign of gracious abundance, showing that God intends to bless his people and to restore his relationship with them. I think, too, that we can learn from the fact that Jesus performs this miracle at a wedding. He is not responding, on this occasion, to overwhelming human need, but he is blessing the coming together of humans in relationship, as they triumph over their differences to become one in fruitful love. I am much encouraged by these occasions when the Lord gives the benefit of his ministry not just, as so often, to individuals who show exemplary signs of faith and belief in him, but also on other occasions, when, for example, as we heard in Friday's mass, some people who are trying to bring a paralytic to Jesus and cannot get through the crowd take the extraordinary step of breaking through the roof to get at him. We don't know that the paralytic himself had faith, but his friends certainly did. And what about the other feeding miracles to which this miracle is linked – did not the Lord feed anyone who was there? They can't all have been perfect apprentice saints. There is, you see, a wonderfully indiscriminate generosity about God's love which is very encouraging to us.

It shouldn't surprise us, of course, when God gives his blessing to a whole group of people, because that is how he seems to prefer to work. Since that time that Abram first set out from Haran, and became Abraham, father of a mighty people, God has blessed his people and made the basis of any relationship with him the incorporation of human individuals into the community of faith. When we understand this, we should be terribly encouraged by it. In this great group of pilgrims, there are all sorts of folk who are at all sorts of different stages of the pilgrimage to God. God has showered his blessings on all of them, and his son, who came to redeem us and shepherd us to heaven, started by bringing the wine. I can relate to that.