

2nd Sunday of Ordinary Time

January 17, 2010

INTRODUCTION: (Isaiah 62, 1-5; I Corinthians 12, 4-11; John 2, 1-11) For almost fifty years the Jews were captives and exiles in Babylon (modern day Iraq). But then the Persians (modern day Iran) conquered the Babylonians, and they allowed God's people to return home. The Persians were even willing to give them financial aid to rebuild their Temple, their homes, their cities and their farms. The prophet in today's first reading announces this wonderful event that God would bring his people back home. During their exile God had not forgotten his people and would take his people back to himself as his bride. The image of God marrying his people is an important biblical image, found in several of the prophets, and is the best symbol from our human experience that can be used to describe the affection God has for us. This wedding image prepares the way for the gospel account of Jesus' first miracle at the wedding feast of Cana.

HOMILY: Since our gospel is about a wedding, I want to start with a few quotes that offer some wit and wisdom about marriage. James Thurber said: "the most dangerous food is wedding cake." Ruth Graham said: "A happy marriage is the union of two forgivers." Lyndon Johnson: "Only two things are necessary to keep one's wife happy. One is to let her think she is having her own way; the other, to let her have it." Mignon McLaughlin: "A successful marriage requires falling in love many times, always with the same person." Joseph Barth: "Marriage is our last, best chance to grow up." Bill Cosby: "For two people in a marriage to live together day after day is unquestionably the one miracle the Vatican has overlooked." (quotes taken from Readers' Digest, 5/09, pg 184)

Since our gospel is about wine, I have a quote from Benjamin Franklin: "We hear of the conversion of water into wine ... as a miracle. But this conversion is, through the goodness of God, made every day before our eyes. Behold the rain which descends from heaven upon our vineyards; there it enters the roots of the vines, to be changed into wine – a constant proof that God loves us, and loves to see us happy." (from Readers' Digest, 6/09, pg 159)

Making wine is a lengthy process; the miracle, of course, is that Jesus made the wine instantaneously, made it of such excellent quality and in such great abundance (120 to 150 gallons). What is the point of his doing that and what is the point of this story for us? John tells us it was a sign. So it's meant to tell us something. Let us explore what the sign tells us. It was not a sign that Jesus was opening up a new wine shop in the neighborhood. His mission would not be limited to time or place. As we sang in the psalm refrain, his mission was to all nations. God's people were always praying for and looking for the day when God would come to save his people. That day was often expressed in wedding imagery (as we heard in today's first reading) and an abundance of wine would mark the arrival of that day. I would like to quote from several places in the Old Testament where an abundance of wine would be a sign of God's coming as our savior. We read in Isaiah: "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines; ... he will

destroy death forever. The Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces...On that day it will be said: "behold our God, to whom we looked to save us!" (Is 25,6.9) Or again from Isaiah: "you who have no money, come, receive grain and eat; come without paying and without cost, drink wine and milk!" (Is. 55,1) Amos tells us: "The days are coming says the Lord, when...the juice of grapes shall drip down the mountains and all the hills shall run with it." (Amos 9, 13) In Proverbs we read about wisdom, personified as a woman who has built her house, dressed her meat, mixed her wine and has spread her table. She sends out her maidens and calls out to the city to all who would be wise and understanding: "come, eat my food, and drink of the wine I have mixed!" (Prov. 9,1-5) Overindulgence in alcohol is foolishness and destructive, but the Jewish people have always had one of the lowest percentages of alcoholism of all nationalities. They respect its power and thus it is for them a symbol of joy and celebration and, according to their Scriptures, it is a sign of the abundance of joy with which God would bless his people on the day of salvation.

But that's not all that the miracle tells us, for, as a sign it tells us a lot of other things, such as, it was a sign of who Jesus is. It was a sign of his unique person – as John's gospel tells us: "he revealed his glory and his disciples began to believe in him." It was a sign that he was the messiah who would bring God's blessing of salvation to all God's people. Since he would be a light to all nations, as is often spoken of him, it is not just the Jewish people who would share in God's blessings. He would be a blessing for all people who would follow him. Another meaning to this sign is that this would be the beginning of Jesus' saving work, a term described as his "hour." His work would lead to his execution and his resurrection as he well knew. Perhaps knowing what was ahead for him, Jesus wasn't in a hurry to begin his work. So when his mother, Mary, described the difficult problem of not having enough wine, his response was, "my hour has not yet come." Notice she didn't push him into anything, but she probably knew he would want to help this young couple who would have been dreadfully embarrassed if their celebration came to a rapid end. Mary just said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." (Good advice for any and all of us.) Another sign here for me is his interest in every detail of our own lives. Did he not tell us in another place: "Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. Even all the hairs of your head are counted. (Mt. 10, 29) It was a sign he came to change things: he changed sick people into people who were well, he changed sinners into saints, he changed death into a pathway into everlasting life, he changed bread and wine into his body and blood. Finally, the miracle at Cana was a sign of the Eucharist, in which he would give his blood for us, his blood, which represents his life and his blessings that are offered to those who come to be nourished by him. Amen.