

Epiphany 2C (1/17/10 – *Weddings, Good Wine, and Christ's Epiphany*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

This is always an interesting account – our Lord's turning water into wine at that wedding at Cana. We might be tempted to wonder about things that are clearly peripheral – Who were the bride and groom?, How was Jesus' mother involved?, How did not only Jesus but also His disciples get invited?, How many guests were there and just how much did they drink? I can say that these things are clearly peripheral – and unimportant – because God did not choose to inspire St. John (nor any of the other Evangelists) to record them. If they were important, He would have told us. It's that simple.

But there are several things – prompted by the inspired text – that we do and should legitimately wonder about. The first one is this: What are we to make of Mary's response to our Lord's seeming reluctance to do anything about the situation? After all, if I were to ask Jesus for something – we call it prayer – and He came back with a *No* as clear as this seems, I would consider it weakness of faith ... even arrogance ... on my part to go ahead with whatever I had asked. Some have chalked it up to the fact that Mary took advantage of being Jesus' mother – *Even if He doesn't really want to do anything; I can coerce Him by telling the servants to “Do whatever He tells you.” Because I know He will surely honor me – I'm His mother ... and He won't break any of the commandments.* Some churches would even use this as an indicator that we should pray to Mary – because she'll get the Lord to do it, even if He isn't at first inclined to do so. But that surely cannot be the lesson we are to gather from this particular part of our *Holy Gospel* text. Because that would make us “lords” over our Lord – and that cannot be ... nor would it be right for us. For the student is not above his teacher, nor the servant above his master – and Jesus is both our Teacher and our Master and Lord. No ... we must look for another explanation here.

And the one that seems best is another occasion when our Lord seemed to say *No*, but His ultimate answer was *Yes* – the request of the Syrophoenician woman [Mk 7.26]. The Lord's momentary *No* is one meant to exhort further faith – and patience – in the one asking ... and in us who observe from afar. As an aside, we should be clear that in no way is Jesus disrespectful to His mother, Mary. He is, simply, stating the fact that the hour – the time – of revealing His true glory and His power over creation

were not yet at hand.

But let us also not get bogged down in such things. For, there are much more important considerations here in this Word of God that relates the very first miraculous sign of our Lord. Another aside – this text is one of the reasons the so-called “Gospel of Thomas” would have been rejected by the early Church. By inspiration St. John tells us that the turning of water into wine at Cana was *the first of His signs* [JN 2.11]. Whoever wrote the “Gospel of Thomas” – long after Thomas was dead – tells of Jesus doing miraculous signs as a Boy. But God does not lie – nor does He contradict Himself. Consequently, the Church did the only thing it could do – since John’s Gospel was well-known as having come from his inspired pen – they rejected the spurious writing and excluded it from the New Testament.

The first subject matter I would like to consider, I would place under the category of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Mary, placing His imprimatur – His seal of approval – on a few matters. First, on Marriage itself – which should be obvious, I suppose, since He is the same God Who said that in all of His good creation, it was not good for the man, Adam, to be alone ... and then made woman from Adam’s side. God’s design for marriage between one man and one woman continues to hold – also now after the great Fall into Sin. True, it is corrupted terribly by our sin. There is not a husband or wife that has lived up to what God originally intended marriage to be – even among Christians. We don’t always hold it in the honor and respect we should. We certainly don’t always love, honor, and subject ourselves to one another as we ought. But that doesn’t change God’s good design for marriage. We must strive, daily, to live up to what our Lord expects and commands here. And when we fail and fall, repent, receive Christ’s forgiveness, and seek with God’s help to do better. As Christians we should promote God-pleasing marriage in our society – and work against all that would undermine this blessed institution.

Second, we see that Wedding Feasts are also acceptable to the Lord – so long as they are done in a God-pleasing way ... without in any way defiling any of His commands. Throwing a big party on such a blessed occasion is quite all right by the Lord – He not only gives His OK but even participates ... and brings His disciples along so that they see it is not necessary to be a hermit to lead a Godly life.

And third, Christ indicates that the drinking of wine – even much wine – is not sin ... so long as one is not a drunkard, is not thereby tempted into sin, and does not thereby fall into sin. Our Lord at this wedding at Cana miraculously makes more than 120 gallons of the very best wine – and that after they had already run through an unknown quantity of wine. God does not forbid the drinking of alcohol altogether – contrary to what some churches might add to the Word of God. But in all things we are to act in moderation and self-control, lest we fall into great shame and vice – and adorn our Christian lives with Godly actions to the glory of God.

But there is much more here – and this, now, gets to the real meat of this text. We have to draw from other portions of God’s Holy Word to get at this meat – including our *Old Testament Lesson* appointed for this **Second Sunday after The Epiphany**. But that’s the right way to go about understanding God’s Word. We permit – even seek out – other portions of His Word to instruct us on how rightly to interpret and apply a particular verse or passage. *Scripture interprets Scripture* is what we call it. Since it is **all** God’s Word from beginning to end – from GENESIS to REVELATION – it is good and proper to use other parts of God’s Word to give us a fuller, better understanding of what we are reading and hearing.

Through His prophet Isaiah, God holds out before Israel – and us – a most wonderful picture and promise. Through Isaiah God had foretold Israel’s exile to Babylon – punishment for their idolatry and unfaithfulness. But He also promised that after a time – after His people had been driven to their knees in repentance ... seeking the mercy of God – He would bring them home and build them up and make them great again in the eyes of the world. For, that is the way the Lord works with us, His fallen, sinful creatures. He tears down that He might build up. He wounds in order that He might gently bind us up and heal us. He hammers us with His Law that we might know our sin and be brought to repentance ... and then He comes quickly with the soothing message of the Gospel so that we might know our forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ.

In our *Old Testament* for today, God speaks about Jerusalem – the center of Israel – being called **Forsaken** and **Desolate** [ISA 62.4]. That is what the nations said ... that is how Israel looked, no doubt – as if God had forsaken His people, left them to the abuse of the surrounding nations, left her city

empty. That is how we can feel sometimes – forsaken by God ... our lives like a desolate wasteland ... devoid of every blessing. Things can feel that way to us – if we are being disciplined by God ... or if the world and the devil seem to have the upper hand ... or if at least we seem to have received a rotten lot in life. But God promises that such things are just a passing situation – even should it last a generation.

God promised the exiled Israelites that there would come a time when: *You shall no longer be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married.* [ISA 62.4] You see, *as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you* [62.5]. God has betrothed Himself to you ... and you to Himself. And He is no unfaithful Husband – though you fail to be His faithful bride again and again. God will never leave you nor forsake you. He has made you bone of His bone and flesh of His Flesh – that is what Christmas was all about ... the incarnation ... God joining Himself to you and your humanity ... forever. As many times as you fall into sin and make yourself unfaithful and undeserving, He lifts you up and cleanses you anew to restore you as His spotless, sinless, radiant, holy Bride.

And as our Savior says elsewhere, *there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents* [LK 15.7]. Each and every time a sinner repents and is restored to the forgiveness, life, and salvation Christ, our glorious Bridegroom, has purchased and won for us by His Cross, the Wedding Feast is celebrated anew ... always ... even forever. And here in this foretaste of that Wedding Feast to come, we receive already now the Good Wine of the Body and Blood of Christ in His *HOLY SUPPER*. Yes, Christ has poured out the wine of His forgiveness upon you already – in your Baptism that we remember each week in the *INVOCATION* ... in the *ABSOLUTION* ... and here in the preaching of the Gospel. But He saves the Good Wine – the Best Wine – for last ... here in the *HOLY COMMUNION*. Here in this *SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR* the Bridegroom comes to you and gives you His very Self ... rejoicing over you ... because He has married Himself to you ... and you to Himself ... and you are His Delight ... forever. That is the enduring meaning of *Weddings, Good Wine, and Christ's Epiphany*.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]