

Epiphany 2, 2017

“This beginning of signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory, and His disciples believed on Him”. (St. John 2.11)

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Today marks the second Sunday after the Epiphany. ‘Epiphany’ means ‘manifestation’ or ‘showing forth’. So the Epiphany Season is about God manifesting or showing Himself on earth. This morning’s Gospel presents us with an instance when God manifested Himself; actually, it presents us with the first miracle of Jesus, the Son of God, when He manifested His power and glory in the changing of water into wine at a wedding in Cana of Galilee.

This is a very familiar Gospel: there was a wedding in the town of Cana, and Jesus and His mother and His disciples were all invited. During the wedding feast, the couple ran out of wine. This was communicated to St. Mary, and she, in turn, mentioned it to Jesus. He seemed to put her off by saying, “O woman, what is that to thee and to me; mine hour has not yet come.” But, then, not long afterwards, He instructed the servants to fill up the water pots that were on hand.

There were six of these water pots, and they each held 20-30 gallons each. That is a lot of water! Previously, these pots had been used by the Jewish wedding guests for washing their hands. Having been told by St. Mary to do whatever Jesus told them, the servants went ahead and filled the water pots with water. Then, once filled, He said, “Draw some of the water out now, and take it to the governor of the feast”. Whether by using a cup or a ladle, the servants did it and made their way to the Master of Ceremonies.

As you know, the M.C. tasted the sample, and immediately smiled! He had no idea where this wine had come from, but it was, as we say, “some good”! Quickly, the Emcee called the groom over, and exclaimed, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” The Passage then finishes with this word: “This beginning of signs – this first miracle – Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory, and His disciples believed on Him”.

Up to this point, the Lord had not manifested His glory by doing miracles -- this was His first. John Keble, a 19th century Church of England priest, put it this way: "The miracle of Cana was remarkable because it was the beginning of miracles. Then the veil began to be drawn up, which had up to this point concealed the power of the Holy Jesus over this visible world. He made that world in the beginning: He was in it always, upholding it by the Word of His power: but as yet it knew Him not".

As we think about this, there are some important questions which need to be asked if we are to understand why the Lord did what He did. First, why did He choose to do His first miracle at a wedding? Let's pause for a minute and try to imagine the scene there in Cana. It may help to try and visualize the last time you were to a wedding: generally, people are happy; there is food and laughter; there is music, the wedding cake and lots of good will; and, there are the newly weds: the bride and groom.

Interestingly, in the vows undertaken by the bride and groom we are to understand a great mystery. As they promise "to have and to hold one another from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death parts them" – as they pledge this to each other – Christians are reminded of the love which Christ has for the Church. In fact, St. Paul told this to the Church in Ephesus. He said, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."

If we go back, now, to that wedding feast in Cana, and reflect on why Jesus chose to do His first miracle there, we have to consider this great mystery. Could it be that by changing the water into wine at that marriage feast, Jesus was emphasizing God's desire to take a bride for Himself? Indeed, He had called and made a people for Himself in the nation of Israel. This miracle at Cana continued that and furthered it. The Church which He was now about to form would proclaim and administer His new creation – the new creation in which death is defeated, sin is forgiven, and souls are saved and redeemed forever.

With this understanding, John Keble connected the changing of the water to the bigger picture. He said: “The Jewish law and ceremonies, the saints and commandments and histories of the Old Testament, were now to be made known to men in their full and high meaning. ‘The darkness is past and the true Light now shines’. That which was glorious in Moses, has no glory now, in comparison of the glory which excels. The Passover is turned into the Holy Communion; circumcision into Baptism; the brazen serpent into the Cross; the cleansing of the leper into the Absolution or remission of sins; Moses and the Prophets into Christ and His Apostles; the glory of the Lord over the Mercy Seat into the inward Presence of God the Holy Ghost.”

Let’s stop for a minute and think about this: Jesus turned water into wine, but that is not all He wants to change. He wants to transform this world and all its people. We are just people; ordinary; mere mortals with a fallen nature distressed by our sins; we are like plain, tasteless water. And yet, the Lord has come to fill us with His Spirit – His powerful, life-giving Holy Spirit – and to change us. In baptism, He washes us and cleanses us, applying the precious Blood of His Son to our sin-stained souls. He adopts us as His own Children and grafts us into the Body of Christ, uniting us to Himself, so that His life is ours. And this is forever!

Once we were the children of Adam and Eve; now we are the children of God. Once we were sinners without hope; now we are saved and redeemed, and counted as the saints of God! Once we walked in darkness, now we live in the Light. Once we were destined to die; now we shall live forever with Christ in the Kingdom of Heaven. Once we were like water; now we are like a rich, quality wine.

The Epistle today, speaks of the quality of our new life in Christ. In writing to the Church in Rome about the gifts of the Spirit, St. Paul underlines the change which the Spirit of God brings to our souls. “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another...Bless them which persecute you; bless and curse not...Mind not high things but condescend to men of low estate.” Every aspect of what Paul is saying goes against our natural wills; but

that's the point: we have been changed; we are being changed; and we will be completely changed, as the Lord carries out His work in us.

The manifestation of God's glory in the miracle at Cana is a reminder to us that the Lord is even now filling this world with the knowledge of His glory. This is the primary message of the Epiphany Season – the showing forth of God's glory. And, just as we cannot stop the sun from rising and shining its beautiful, warm rays upon us, so we cannot impede the shining forth of God's glory.

Chiefly He has made Himself and His Truth and Grace known through His Son; but He has also given us His Spirit; and He has caused His holy Word to be written, revealing His glory to us there. He has always manifested Himself to humans in the wonders of nature; and He continues to use the Church to manifest His glory. As broken and splintered and weak as the Church is, God uses the instruments of His grace to transform weary souls. In baptism, in the Holy Communion, in Christian Marriage, in the Laying on of Hands – by these and other means He is causing His glory to shine, so that people may come to Him and be changed.

Let us think on these things, dear friends. Let us consider them carefully and be assured that the Lord has a plan for His Church. Where we are weak, He is strong. And, He does not call us to success but rather to faithfulness. May the Good News we have heard today take deep root in our hearts, and may we act upon it for His glory.

And now unto God Almighty: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost...