

The Second Sunday After Epiphany
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at the Chapel of the Cross
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+ Jesu juva +

THE MYSTICAL MARRIAGE, THE SACRAMENTAL FEAST
John 2:1-11

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Last week we witnessed the child, Jesus, in the Temple astounding the rabbis with His knowledge and understanding. Today we see Him some 18 years later performing His first miracle. It is now the third day since John baptized Him in the Jordan River and proclaimed that He had seen the Holy Spirit descend upon Him and that this Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God. The following day John had again pointed out Jesus saying, "Behold the Lamb of God!" Now this Divine Son of God and Savior of mankind manifests His glory by performing the first of many miracles. And what does He do? Does He restore sight to a blind man? Does He heal a leper? Cast out a demon? Raise a dead person back to life? He would go on to do these things, but not that day. No, His first miracle is to turn somewhere between 120 and 180 gallons of water into wine.



Were this not written in the Holy Gospel and written about Jesus, we might think such a thing frivolous. Here is God become a man, wielding Divine power, able to perform whatever miracle He may choose, and He chooses to play the sommelier, the vintner, providing wine to a wedding feast whose supply has begun to run dry. Now while we may appreciate this gesture by Jesus as giving license to the enjoyment of festivities and of good wine (for after all, the wine He made was superior to whatever other wines they served at that party), we must ask why does Jesus begin His ministry with a miraculous sign such as this. There must be something more going on

here than the endorsement of feasting and drinking. Jesus first miracle must be about more than His taking the place of Bacchus.

And indeed there is more to it. Much more. First, our Lord is concerned not so much over the lack of wine as He is about honoring and celebrating marriage. Marriage, after all, is one of God's finest gifts to mankind and one of the first

gifts. It was established by God in the Garden of Eden before man's fall into sin. And it was given so that man would not live a life of sterility, alone with Himself only, but that He might live a life that was fruitful as God's own life was fruitful. First, that man may have someone like himself to love and upon whom to bestow his care and favor; that he might have someone other than himself to be responsible for, that he might give of himself sacrificially for the good of another to whom he has been bound by God. Second, that man may receive the benefit of not living alone, in that he may have companionship and help in his labors, that his work may be more fruitful, and again, more akin to God's own working (for God is in continual relationship within the Holy Trinity, each Divine Person to the Others while sharing one Divine Essence). And third, that man might produce offspring, which he cannot do alone. That Christ performs his first miracle at a wedding shows that God still highly honors marriage, and wants us to honor it too.

How far our society has drifted from what God has ordained in this regard. How little marriage is honored in the world today, or even in the church. In our culture we are witnessing the gradual and systematic destruction of marriage, as the very things for which God gave it are ripped away from it. No longer do people see sexuality as something to be enjoyed in marriage alone, and no longer is sex considered to have much to at all to do with what is in reality its primary purposes, those of uniting two into one flesh and of bearing children. The idea that marriage might be necessary to our welfare and success is lost on today's society where one is taught that to have a helpmate is a restriction not a help; a ball and chain, rather than a partner; where even those in marriage are encouraged to pursue their own independent paths along side of one another rather than a common life together. And the concept of self-sacrificial love and submission? This is the first thing to be left behind, for that, our world says, is not what marriage should be about, but rather about the pursuit of one's own fulfillment and happiness, about receiving love rather than giving it, about protecting one's rights rather than submitting to another's authority. And so our world is turning marriage on its head, so much so, that it does not even need to be between a man and a woman any longer according to the prevailing culture and according to our government.

And how well have Christians honored marriage? Perhaps with our words we have done a better job of upholding this sacred institution, but what of our attitudes and our actions? Haven't Christians often bought into the same sinful attitudes and actions about marriage as the unbelieving world has? Have not Christian congregations and pastors at times even sanctified that which God condemns in regard to marriage? Insofar as we ourselves have adopted these things we must repent of them, for our Lord holds marriage much higher than this, and much more sacred.

And this brings us to the second reason that Jesus performs His first miracle at a wedding feast. For the wedding that He was attending, and all marriages whether Christian or not, reflect the mystical union between Christ and His Church. Jesus refers to Himself several times in the Gospels as the Bridegroom. St. John the Baptist and St. Paul also call Him the Bridegroom. And St. Paul says that we should regard marriage as a reflection of the greater marriage of Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5). It is for this reason that Christ has come down from heaven, to gather, save, and sanctify His Bride. No wonder then that He performs His first miracle at a wedding. For it is on account of a wedding that He will do all of His miracles and all of His teaching, all of His living, dying and rising as a man.

And now He has called and sanctified us to be members of His Bride, having washed us in the waters of Holy Baptism and having claimed us as His own. What does this mean for us but that He as the heavenly Bridegroom has shown and will continue to shower His love upon us. For He has united Himself to us, causing us to share in His flesh, filling us with Himself and grafting us into Him.

And He continues to perform the miraculous and to provide wine for the feast. The Holy Communion of the Church is a participation in the heavenly wedding feast of the Bridegroom and the Bride. Here He instructs His steward to fill the cup with wine, but speaks His words and makes that wine into His blood. Here indeed is a greater miracle than changing water into wine, for by changing wine into blood, He takes the festal drink and infuses it with His own life, making it a sin-forgiving, eternal life-giving, faith-strengthening draught. Here is the celebration of the union of the Bride to the Bridegroom, and here is the ongoing union itself, as she receives Him through eating and drinking His feast.

And this feast of which we partake now by faith, we will partake of eternally at the heavenly wedding feast of the Bridegroom and His holy bride, whom He has made to be without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but who is called holy as He is holy, not by her purity or merit, but by His grace and love, for which we give thanks now and forever, as we partake of His miraculous feast. And as we partake, we rejoice. For Christ is again manifesting His glory among us and strengthening our belief in Him. For He has truly kept the good wine until now. Amen.

+ Soli Deo gloria +