

Saint Thomas' Church
Epiphany III
January 26, 2020
rmcneely+

In today's Gospel
We take the next step in the life of Our Lord, with His first miracle

It is a few days into His selection of the Apostles
And not long after
His dramatic baptism by John in the Jordan
The story takes place in Cana,
A very small village town not far from Nazareth
on the occasion of a wedding.

One thing we need to know about Jewish weddings in those days
Is that they took a week.
There was a ceremony, followed by days of partying.
Sounds like something you looked forward to attending.
It was the social obligation of the groom to provide everyone
With food and drink for the entire week.

Some of you know of the social ethic of Semitic and Arabic
peoples from your travels there
From my limited experience
It is still like that today.
Providing hospitality is high on the list of social obligation.
The social faux pas of running out of wine at this wedding
Is bigger than we know
And would have been the source of scathing criticism
And disgrace for years.

So much for the setting.

The second thing we need to keep in mind is that it is St John
Giving us this story.

John's Gospel is different from the other three.
 John wrote to us with the knowledge that the Story of Jesus' life
 Had already been written by Matthew, Mark and Luke.
 So John is not writing to tell us what happened
 As much as he is writing to us to figure out what it means.
 When reading John we should always look for that deeper
 meaning.

So a priest is meeting with the Sunday School kids who had just
 been discussing this very Gospel. He asked them what happened
 in the story.

And one little girl said that the host had run out of wine at a
 wedding party and the guests would have been terribly
 disappointed and some even angry at the host.

They also said Jesus had performed a miracle right there at the
 party and had saved the day when He turned water into wine.

The priest asked little Thomas what the meaning of the story
 was. Tommie thought a long moment and brightened up suddenly
 and said:

I know

The meaning is

that you should always invite Jesus to your parties.

I can't disagree with little Tommie but I think there are some
 deeper meanings that we should take with us through those doors
 into the world today.

Let's look first at the timing of the miracle at Cana.

John begins it with:

“And the third day . . .”

We do not know precisely what the two previous days were
 nor the precise timing of the wedding miracle.

And John is not interested in telling us. What mattered to
 John was the symbolic time reference . . . the third day.

We know from both Old and New Testament that there is something significant about the third day;

In the Bible

The third day

is the time for theophany :

the meeting of God and man.

It was on the third day at Mt. Sinai that Moses encountered God

So, is this first miracle the prefiguring

of history's final

and decisive theophany:

the Resurrection of Christ

. . . on the third day?

John is hinting that at Cana,

God first reveals himself

in a way that carries forward

the events of the Old Testament,

all of which have the character of a promise

and are now straining

toward their fulfillment.

It's John, so we must look deeper. There is more.

Water is changed to wine.

We, who know its significance, cannot help but think of the wine of the Last Supper,

the Eucharist,

when wine becomes the blood of Christ,

the blood of Christ

that was shed at Calvary

for our sins. For our redemption.

Was Jesus pointing us toward His crucifixion?
Toward our salvation?

There is another aspect linked to timing in the story: Jesus tells Mary “My time is not yet come”

It’s a comment he will make several times over the next three years.

In an immediate sense,
Jesus does not act and decide of his own likes.
But always in harmony
with the Father’s will and plan.

More particularly, His “hour”
is his “glorification”,
which brings together the Cross and His Resurrection
His presence
and Sacrament
throughout the world.

The “hour” of Jesus’ glory begins at the moment of the Cross. And its precise historical setting is at Passover.

At the very time when the Passover lambs were being sacrificed upon the Jewish altar,
Jesus’ blood is pouring out on the cross,
As the Lamb of God
sacrifices Himself for mankind.

Jesus tells his mother
that his hour is not yet come.
He connects the present hour
with the mystery of the cross.
He stamps the miracle at Cana
as an anticipation of that hour,
tying together the miracle of turning water into wine
with that of the Cross and Resurrection.

But the transformation of water into wine has yet another
significance.

The large pots that Jesus used to changed water into wine,
were the water pots used in the Jewish ritual of purification
and so the water is thought to represent

Judaism itself,
the old covenant,
the law of Moses
and the 613 regulations of the Jews.

It had run its course and remained but as an empty husk,
the heart and life were gone out of it.

The wine of the wedding feast
like the wine of Judaism
had run out,
had run its course.

The wedding feast would end in disgrace;
the host had not adequately provided for his guests.

Judaism still existed as a religion,
but it had degenerated into a cold,
mechanical routine,
exemplified here by the purification ritual
Judaism was utterly destitute of joy in God.
Israel had lost the joy of its espousal.

Israel could no longer bring itself from the pit of its despair.
It needed a saviour
And without a saviour how could there be any joy?

It remained only that Judaism be set aside and the bringing
of a new and better hope.

Man needed a Saviour
and only Jesus could be the One,
the One who could restore the wine,
to restore the joy of salvation
to the wedding party
and to all of mankind.

This first miracle points us toward the new covenant with
God,
toward the new religion,
toward the crucifixion
as Jesus makes the water into the wine.
Changes the old into the new

In the world
 and as with Satan,
 it gives its best first:
 And keeps its worst for last
 Satan tempts us with sin
 and its fraudulent
 and evaporating pleasures
 Then come the wages of sin—death

But God does just the opposite;
 He leads his followers into the wilderness
 Before He brings them into the promised land
 First the cross ---- then the crown
 For us, the best wine is yet to come.

In this season of Epiphany,
 when we focus on the manifestation of God to man,
 the first miracle of our Lord
 is an appropriate beginning
 for Jesus to reveal himself and His ministry.

We thus begin to understand the miracle at Cana. But there
 is one more thing that we need to know of today's Gospel:
 Of course, St. John wrote it in Greek

The word that he used has been translated as
 “miracle”.

But the literal Greek word John,
 and only John,
 uses is not miracle
 ... it is the Greek word for “sign”.

So in John's literal words,
this is not the first miracle of Jesus ,
it is the first SIGN of Jesus.

So just like the many signs we see every day in our lives,
this is a sign
that will help direct our lives in safety

It will help us navigate our way
and lead us to our destination
help us find the necessities of our lives.

It will help prepare us for what is coming

It will warn us of what may be if we are not prepared

Let us pay attention to the signs of our lives.
And to the Biblical signs along that narrow pathway to
God.

The consequence is nothing less
Than everlasting life.