

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
Third Sunday after Epiphany
January 21, 2024
rmcneely+

So Father Swithin is meeting with the Sunday School kids
who had just been discussing this very Gospel for today.
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.
The kids enthused that 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.

In line with the Church School Kids, we conclude the Epiphany
Season with St John's account
Of the miracle at the wedding feast at Cana.
[NB: next week we begin the Pre-Lenten Season.]
It is an intriguing account given to us only by St John.

The story involves a wedding feast in the Galilean town of Cana,
Thought to be not far from Nazareth, Jesus' home town.
It involves Mary,
The disciples,
the host or governor and the servants.

Six water pots,
 And 30 year old Jesus
 in what seems to be the first miraculous evidence
 of His divine origin.

John begins the story with a mystery:
 “On the third day . . .”.
 He gives us no clues as to what came before.
 The third day after what?

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.
 Hold that thought for a moment.

When word gets out that the host has run out of wine,
 Mary, perhaps with a raised eyebrow, looks to Jesus
 And says “They have no wine”.
 Can we infer that Mary knows of the divine powers
 And is not so subtly suggesting
 that Jesus do something about that?
 Jesus’ response is a surprise.
 “Woman, what have I to do with thee”?
 He adds: “mine hour is not yet come”.

Uncharacteristically rude, don’t you think?
 People have pondered it for centuries.
 The best thinking observes that the Hebrews had such an
 expression that could be a rebuke
 But that in this context
 Is more like Jesus letting Mary know that Jesus
 Was well aware of the problem and His supernatural powers.
 And that He was prepared to exercise them
 But only when the time was right.
 So there is a plan, a goal, a purpose
 That Jesus must follow.

And then Mary turns to the servants and offers eternal advice:
 “Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it.”
 We would do well to remember that advice.

And then come those pots.
 Six of them.
 Not just any pots, but ceremonial pots of the Jews.
 Pots instrumental in the rite of purification.
 Important,
 Foundational.
 The pots are huge.
 They contain 2 or 3 firkins a piece.

Now it may have been some time since you held a firkin in the hand

So let me refresh you.

A Hebrew firkin is a measurement of volume equal to about 70 of our gallons.

So do the math

That means that each pot holds from 140 to 210 gallons
All together that means they total some 840 to 1260 gallons.
Wine in this instance.

That has to be more than the entire village of Cana can drink
In a week.

Why so much wine?

What is John telling us?

It is apparent that Jesus has changed water into wine.

But is there more to explain the vast quantity?

What began as a Jewish rite with water

Ended with Wine.

We of the faith cannot consider wine without

Thinking of the Blood of Christ that is consecrated at each
Holy Communion.

So if the Jewish water became the Christian Blood

Is Jesus foretelling the end of the Jewish religion

And the beginning of Christianity?

The volume of water into wine makes one think that
the entirety of Judaism is involved here.

Is this anything less than the superceding of Judaism
By Christianity?

Judaism would still exist 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.

Moreover, the wine is of the highest quality.
 John describes the custom of the day
 (and I daresay, today)
 of hosts serving their best first
 and relying on the dulled senses of their guests
 to disguise the lesser quality wine later in the evening.

But the wine from water is of the highest quality.
 Even the host commented upon it to the bridegroom
 (perhaps a not so hidden reference to our Bridegroom, Jesus.

Is it a lesson about Satan and how he works in our world?
 The deceiver first offers the “pleasures” of sin.
 The fraudulent and evaporative temptations
 But later the reality lands like a ton of bricks.
 The pleasures are no longer
 To be replaced by the eternal agony of Hell.
 The wages of sin are death.

God works in just the opposite manner.
 We first encounter the challenge
 God leads His followers into the desert
 Before He brings them into the Promised Land
 For us, it is, 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.

