

Sermon for the Second Sunday after the Epiphany

“And the third day, there was a wedding.”

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The season of Epiphany celebrates the various occasions wherein Our Lord reveals his divine identity. It may strike some of us as odd that, of all the manifold divine signs which Jesus worked, whether feeding thousands or commanding storms, the miracle of turning water into wine is not the most spectacular; surely it is not on the same rank as the account which begins the season of Epiphany, that of the Baptism of our Lord wherein the skies were rent open and the voice of the Father thundered; and most definitely, it seems to shrink in comparison with that reading which will close the season of Epiphany, the Transfiguration.

The miracle is rather humble: There is a marriage, a uniting of two very dissimilar things, a man and a woman. A marriage is a thing of joy, and how can one have joy without wine?

And yet disaster strikes; they have run out of wine. No wine, no joy; no joy, no wedding, or at least a forgettable wedding, every host's nightmare.

The Mother of Our Lord asks Jesus to do something about it: *“They have no wine!”* But Jesus retorts: *“Woman, what have I do to with you? My hour has not yet come.”* Here again we see the oneness of Christ's mind, the purity of his heart. He thinks only of his ‘hour,’ that is, the hour of his passion. His mind was not concerned with the wine which brings earthly pleasure, but that wine which would gain for us heavenly joy, his sacred blood.

So, perhaps with the guilt-giving exasperation that we have come to associate with the love of a good Jewish mother, Mary summons some

servants and bids them: *"Do whatever he tells you to do."*

The servants bring *Jesus* six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. *Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it. When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine.*

So ends Jesus' first miracle.

It is easy to dismiss this seemingly most humble of all the miracles of Christ. There is nothing exciting about it; no raising of the dead or being penetrated with an ineffable light. Just the making of a fair amount of water into a fair amount of wine, so that a man's wedding night might be well remembered by his friends.

And so now for us the question is: what is the true meaning of the miracle Christ worked at Cana?

It must have some deeper essence, for it is written: *"This was the first of his signs."* The word 'first' is better understood as 'first principle' or 'guiding pattern.' John tells us this miracle is to serve as the principle for understanding Christ's entire ministry.

So what does it mean? The Evangelist gives us a hint with the first words of the story. *"On the third day, there was a wedding."* If one looks back, there is no first or second day recounted in the Gospel; and yet now, there is a third. This is not a literal third day; but a theological third day; and on this third day, there was a wedding, the marriage of mankind to God.

You see, all of human history can be divided into three 'days.'

The first day was that of our fall; the day of mankind's separation from God. We were alone; without love, and without a lover; for by our sin, we

had done away with the Lover of our Soul.

In this day we had no future, for without the love of God, we were destined to remain empty, sterile. Our obstinate wills would not return to God in penitence, but even still our souls secretly cried out in their desolation: *"Do not be far from me O LORD."* *"Do not utterly forsake me!"*

But you see our first Lover heard this cry, for he never ceased loving us. So he visited us in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and through his covenant with them, betrothed himself to all mankind through the people of Israel; he even gave his glorious presence in the temple of Jerusalem as sort of ring, a promise and pledge of the coming wedding.

Thus began the second day, the day of our engagement to God.

We often see coy brides-to-be struck by an almost uncontrollable anticipation, as well as some degree of fear. She goes on diets, hits the gym, and looks into buying new clothes, all to look her best when she finally is joined to her man on that fated day. She seeks to purge herself of every little physical flaw.

So too, did mankind undergo over a thousand years of purification, all in preparation for the coming of the bridegroom. Through the many fastings and penitential sacrifices, through the pious labors and ritual washings of Israel, man prepared for the appointed day, man's wedding with God.

This is what is signified in our Gospel reading by the six jars of water. The water is there for our purification; and there are six of jars, one short of seven, the number of completion and rest; for to one who is soon to be married, there is no rest.

Yet now we see that water must become wine; preparation must become celebration. The Son has become incarnate *'and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.'* Within Christ's body, by the mystery of the Incarnation which we celebrated on Christmas day, the divine nature and the human nature have been fully married to one another. It is now the third day, and as it is written: *"On*

the third day, there was a wedding."

But we should not think that this miracle is merely about the Incarnation; for there is another third day, and with it, another marriage. And this marriage is the complete and utter self-giving of the Son of God, Jesus, to his beloved bride, the Church, in the exaltation of his Passion.

For if the divine nature was wedded to the human nature in the Incarnation; Jesus is wedded to you only through the Crucifixion.

He was beaten, spat on. He was scourged and pierced. Whips tore his flesh; nails thick as fingers were driven through his hands and feet; thorns shredded his brow. Every kind of violence imaginable was inflicted upon him; and he suffered all this of his own free will, as Our Lord even says: "*No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.*" He even bore his own cross, so eager was he to marry his beloved.

For Our Lord knew that it was necessary that he suffer so many terrible things, that he bleed so much, for we needed of him not only water, but wine. We needed not only purgation and forgiveness, but final joy. So it was needful that he be tortured and crucified, so that the wine of his blood might be rendered from his body for us, as from a grape, in the winepress of his Passion.

All so that we might drink of his wine, and be purified by it—the water which dwells within us by baptism finds its fulfillment in the wine of Our Lord's wounds. By this drinking of our God's Passionate suffering, this drinking for which we have gathered here today, it comes to pass that we and Jesus are made one flesh, just as it is written: "*On the third day, there was a wedding.*"

But we cannot leave our beloved Lord so, bloodied and stricken; for there is indeed another third day, and another wedding.

The end of time will come; and through the portal of our blessed death, through the resurrection of the dead following Christ's glorious resurrection of the third day, we will enter into the marriage feast of the Lamb in his kingdom, which will have no end; one rapturous, eternal, joyous

day. The Grace of God will fill us, and the love of God will consume us, just as it is written: *"He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love."*

There we shall meet our bridegroom. There he shall be for us, arrayed in glory, in light. There he will take us; and through his blood, present us to himself, *'a glorious church, not having mark or wrinkle, or any such thing; but as it should be, holy, and without blemish.'* There he will bring us to himself, *'as a young man marries a young woman,'* and pronounce to us our final absolution:

"Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee."

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Isaiah 62:1-5; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11.