

Homily: Second Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)

So the signs of Christmas have disappeared from the church, and we're back in so-called 'Ordinary Time'. Despite that, I think it's fair to say that the events in today's Gospel are anything but ordinary. Jesus works His first 'sign' – His first miracle – turning water into wine at Cana. From ancient times this Gospel has been read at this time of year, and linked with the Epiphany and the Baptism of Jesus, both of which we have celebrated in the last fortnight. They are linked because they reveal Jesus to us. At the Epiphany He was revealed to the nations, symbolised by the three wise men; at His baptism He was revealed as the beloved Son of God and began His public ministry; and at Cana He is revealed as God in our midst, with power even over nature.

Over Christmas we heard several stories involving Jesus' mother, Mary. Today, she makes one final appearance before Jesus moves definitively away from the family home. Mary's role in today's Gospel is twofold. She intercedes for the couple in need, going to Jesus and telling Him: "They have no wine", just as today she continues to pray for us, bringing our needs to her Son and asking Him to help us whenever the wine of life or faith runs dry for us. Secondly, she instructs the stewards: "Do whatever He tells you." At the Annunciation, Mary accepted God's word and did exactly as she had been asked to do. Now she teaches others to do the same. And that includes us: she continues to teach us to listen to her Son's commands.

Mary's presence in today's Gospel is also an important clue to help us understand this whole event. She is only found in one other scene in St John's Gospel: at the foot of the cross as Jesus dies. Right at the start of Jesus' ministry, at His first miracle, Mary is present at this gathering where a couple publicly declare their love for each other. And at the end of her Son's work, she will be there again, as He shows the world the depths of His love for us. The whole of St John's Gospel builds up to that moment, that time when Jesus dies, rises and is glorified for us. Again and again, it is referred to as the 'hour' of Jesus. Whenever we hear of Jesus' 'hour', we understand that it points us towards His death, resurrection and glorification.

When Mary approaches Jesus and says, "They have no wine", it seems that the Lord is not going to help. He responds, "Woman, why turn to me? My *hour* has not come yet." It's as if He is saying, "When my hour comes, *then* I will provide wine." When the hour comes – the hour of His death, resurrection and glorification – then He will give wine. And so He does: at the Last Supper, as the 'hour' of His death begins, He provides wine for His disciples. But here, too, there will be a great transformation. At Cana He turned water into wine; at the hour of His death, He turns wine into His Blood. This Blood will be poured out for us in His death, and it will be given to us in the Eucharist, His ongoing presence which is made possible by His resurrection and glorification.

Jesus today produces as much as 180 gallons of wine. It is an extravagant gift, far beyond the needs of the people at the feast. The size of the gift makes us look beyond this wedding: it points us to when the Lord will provide for the whole world. His Blood will be

poured out for our salvation. The water in those jars was supposed to be used for ritual washing, to make the people clean. The wine which Jesus gives in this moment becomes a sign of His Blood, through which the whole world will be washed clean of sin.

When the steward tasted the wine, he called the bridegroom over and praised him for the quality of this drink. Why? Because the bridegroom is the host of the gathering. The bridegroom is the one who provides the wine. So when Jesus provides the wine, He is telling us: *"I am the bridegroom."* In this moment, this miracle, this sign, He is pointing us to His wedding, in which He is united to His bride, the Church. Scripture had long promised that God would be united to His people in a marriage, a covenant of love. We hear of this in today's first reading, one of many Old Testament passages to use this image: "As the bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." Now Jesus is announcing: the marriage has come. God and humanity, Christ and His Church, are to be united in love.

At a wedding, a couple publicly declare their undying love for one another. And when His hour comes, on the cross, Jesus declares His undying love for us. A love so powerful it conquers death; it is eternal, it is literally 'undying'. It's on the cross that Jesus, the true bridegroom, makes His vows, with His mother looking on. Each time we gather for Mass, He renews those vows, telling us again: this is my Body, given for you; my Blood, poured out for you in love. And by our presence here, by reaffirming our desire to be faithful, we renew our vows to Him. This is the wedding feast of Christ and His Church.

The steward told the bridegroom: "You have saved the best wine till last." And Christ, the true Bridegroom, has done exactly that. Of all the gifts that the Lord has ever given, His greatest gift is His Blood poured out for us on the cross and given to us in the Eucharist. Through this gift we are forgiven and drawn into communion with Him; we are made righteous and we share the life of God Himself. Right at the end of the Bible, heaven is described as a wedding feast between Christ and His Church, a great banquet in which we experience the wonder of God's undying love for us, for all eternity. It is a feast we enter into in some small way at each and every Mass, and which we will one day know in its fulness in heaven. The Lord always saves the best wine till last.

Fr Andrew

