

## The Second Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year C)

<i>First Reading</i>	Isaiah 62:1-5
<i>Response</i>	Proclaim his marvelous deeds to all the nations
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 96:1-2, 2-3, 7-8, 9-10
<i>Second Reading</i>	1 Corinthians 12:4-11
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	God has called us through the Gospel to possess the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.
<i>Gospel</i>	John 2:1-11

The readings for the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time for Year C give us a good example of those occasions when the church will depart from studying a particular synoptic gospel (Matthew, Mark or Luke) and give us a little bit of a taste of St. John's gospel, the fourth gospel. And so, in this year, year C, we take a break from Luke and we look at an important moment at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in the Gospel of John, and that's his famous account of transforming water into wine at the wedding at Cana. This story is particularly important to me (it's one of my favorites) because it touches on a theme of Jesus' identity as a bridegroom. I've written about this in my book, *Jesus the Bridegroom: The Greatest Love Story Ever Told*, so I'm just going to take a few points from the book, *Jesus the Bridegroom*, today, but if you wanted to dig a bit deeper, I really would encourage you to read that book, because this is a beautiful and powerful, mysterious passage. We'll begin with the gospel today and then we'll go back and look at the Old Testament and see how they go together. John 2:1-11, very well-known story, we'll read through it now with a focus though on what it reveals to us about Jesus' identity as bridegroom.

On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples. When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever

he tells you." Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast." So they took it. When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now."

and then John ends with these very important words:

This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him.<sup>1</sup>

That last verse, in my opinion, gives us the clue as to why the church gives us this reading from the Gospel of John at the beginning of ordinary time in our study of the Gospel of Luke. I think the reason the church does this is because John singles out the wedding at Cana (Jesus' action there) as the first miracle of Jesus' public ministry. If you look at the Gospel of John, he uses this word *semeion* (a sign) to describe miracles that are performed by Jesus that are outward signs of some kind of invisible spiritual significance or spiritual reality. And so, the church doesn't want us to go through the three year cycle without having focused on the first miracle Jesus performs in his public ministry, so she inserts it here at the beginning of ordinary time in Year C. Now this raises a very important question for us: "Why does Jesus perform this particular miracle as the first of his signs?"

In theory, Jesus could have done a whole host of things to inaugurate his public ministry. So, for example, if he had wanted to show that the heart of his mission was to conquer the devil, the first thing he could have done would be to perform an exorcism (like he does in the Gospel of Mark, for example). Or, if Jesus had wanted to show that the heart of his mission was to overcome sickness, the first

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

thing he could have done would be to heal a paralyzed man (like he also does in Mark and elsewhere in John). Or, if Jesus wanted to show that the heart of his mission was to overcome the corruption of death, he could have raised someone from the dead, like Lazarus in the Gospel of John 11. But, he doesn't do any of those things as his first miracle; the first thing he does is to change water into wine at a Jewish wedding at the behest of Mary his mother. So what's the significance of that? What would that have signified? What is it revealing to us about who Jesus is and what he's come to accomplish?

I think in order to see this you just kind of have to go back and look at a few details about what a first century Jewish wedding was like. The first thing I would highlight about a Jewish wedding is just the length of a Jewish wedding in contrast to contemporary weddings. So contemporary weddings, at least in the United States, will last for an evening, right? They'll take an evening, a few hours, total. They're very important and they're very expensive and we love to celebrate them, but Jews obviously took weddings even more seriously because for them a wedding would last for a whole week. The celebration of a wedding was a 7-day feast of family and friends gathering to celebrate the coming together of a bridegroom and his bride. And Jesus and his mother had been invited to this country wedding in Cana, this wedding, and that's what it would've entailed: a 7-day feast. Now you can imagine, that much partying, it would be easy to run out of food or drink, and that's exactly what happens in this case. They run out of wine, and Mary (like a good mother) notices, and (this is a little more mysterious) brings it to Jesus' attention, with an implicit request for him to do something about it. Now, granted, Mary does not say, "Hey, fix the problem". She doesn't command Jesus to say it. All she says is, "They have no wine." But, trust me, there's an implicit request undergirding those words. I know this as a husband, because my wife will frequently say similar things, she'll say things like, "It's garbage night". Now, she's not just telling me that, she's implying that I need to do something about it, right? It's a very feminine way of making an implicit request, and that's what Mary's doing, she's making an implicit request through her words. Now Jesus responds to her by saying, "Woman, what's that to you and to me?" (literally, in the Greek)

The RSV is a little strong here with this, "What do you have to do with me?" It makes it sound like the opposition is between Mary and Jesus, but actually, the Greek is a little different. "What to you and to me?" In other words, "how does this

situation concern us?" Which is a good question to ask, even on a human level, because Jesus and Mary are both guests at the wedding, right? I mean, if you go to a wedding and they run out of wine and you're a guest, it's your problem in the sense that you don't have any wine to drink, but it's not your problem in the sense that you have a responsibility to fix it. You're a guest, you're not the host. That's the responsibility of the host. But Jesus says something else, he says, "My hour has not yet come." So, in John's gospel, that points forward to his passion and death, the hour of the cross, the hour of his passion. And so, mysteriously, somehow Mary's words, "they have no wine," Jesus has taken them not just to refer to the problem of the practical loss of wine, but somehow to refer to the hour of his passion and his death. Why does he go there? How does he get from "A" to "Z"? How does he get from "running out of wine" to "the hour of the cross"? I think the answer lies in the messianic banquet tradition of ancient Judaism.

If you go back to the Old Testament in the book of Isaiah, for example, chapter 25, Isaiah says that when the age of salvation comes, there will be a feast of fine wine, of wine on the lees well-refined, and that all the nations will come to this feast, and that when they drink of this wine and eat of this sacrificial banquet, they will swallow up death forever and their sins will be forgiven. In Jewish tradition it came to become called the "messianic banquet", the banquet of the messiah, which would be particularly characterized by super abundant wine. So when Mary says "they have no wine" and invites Jesus, as a guest, to solve the problem, in a first century Jewish context, and in the context of Mary's knowledge of who Jesus is, right, Jesus also perceives there an implicit request to reveal his identity as the Messiah, and to, in a sense, inaugurate the messianic banquet. And what Jesus says to Mary, effectively, is "it's not time for that banquet just yet. My hour has not yet come." But, as a good Jew, who is obedient to his mother, he solves the problem at the wedding at Cana, and in doing so, performs a sign that points forward to what he will accomplish when his hour finally does come. So he calls the servants, they pour the water out, he changes water to wine, and not just a little, it's about 180 gallons of wine. So it's 6 jars, 30 gallons each. That's a lot of wine. I always like to say this to my students, "that's proof that Jesus was Catholic, right?" Because there are some Christians who are teetotalers, who reject all drinking of wine. Jesus here doesn't just make some wine, he makes 180 gallons of it. He makes super abundant wine. So what happens is once the wine's brought to the steward of the feast and he tastes it, he immediately goes to the bridegroom, who is unnamed, but whose

Greek word, *nymphios*, is a reference to the groom, the man who is being married that day. The irony here is that the steward thanks the bridegroom for providing the wine, but you as the reader know that the bridegroom of that festival had nothing to do with it. Who provided the wine? Well, it was Jesus. So what happens is, through Mary's invitation, Jesus takes the role of the bridegroom and miraculously changes water into wine at this wedding feast.

Now why does that matter? Well, for one thing, it reveals to us that Jesus isn't just the King of Israel, he isn't just the Messiah, or the Savior, or the Son of God, or the Great Exorcist, or the Great Teacher, or the Great Prophet. He's all those things, but at the very onset of his ministry, at his heart, at the heart of his ministry, he is revealing that he is also (or should I say, he is first and foremost), the Bridegroom. Because, as we're going to see in a moment, in the Old Testament, the bridegroom, who provides the miraculous feast, who brings in the age of salvation is God himself. The prophets describe God himself as the Divine Bridegroom.

So the wedding at Cana becomes a revelation both of Jesus' messianic identity, but also of his divine identity, his divinity. He is the Divine Bridegroom who has come in person to inaugurate the great wedding supper of the lamb, the feast of salvation, the banquet of the kingdom of God. That's why it's the first sign, because at the end of the day, the way Jesus is going to redeem us is through his love. The cross is going to be an act of love and that's what's going to cover a "multitude of sins" (as Peter says), "Love covers a multitude of sins." So it's the divine love of the divine bridegroom that's going to cover our sins. But it's not time for that just yet, right? He's just getting started with his ministry, so he performs a sign that points forward to what he's going to accomplish, and many of his disciples begin to believe in him.

Okay, so that's the first reading for today. I could say a lot more about the wedding at Cana, we literally just scratched the surface, but, if you want more of that check out the book, *Jesus the Bridegroom* or *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist*, both those books have treatments of the miracle of Cana.

Okay, now if we go back to the Old Testament reading for today, in this case, the Church has selected an Old Testament prophecy that emphasizes the bridegroom theme. It's from Isaiah 62. This is a prophecy of the New Jerusalem, it's Isaiah's de-

scription of the Age of Salvation, in which the city of Jerusalem would be made even more glorious than it ever was at the time of Solomon, in which the city of Jerusalem (which is also called Zion), is depicted as a woman, as a bride; and God, the Lord, is depicted as her groom, her husband, the divine bridegroom. So watch how Isaiah describes this Age of Salvation:

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,  
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,  
until her vindication goes forth as brightness,  
and her salvation as a burning torch.

The nations shall see your vindication,  
and all the kings your glory;  
and you shall be called by a new name  
which the mouth of the LORD will give.  
You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,  
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.  
You shall no more be termed Forsaken,  
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate;  
but you shall be called My delight is in her,  
and your land Married;  
for the LORD delights in you,  
and your land shall be married.  
For as a young man marries a virgin,  
so shall your sons marry you,  
and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,  
so shall your God rejoice over you.

I am going to come back to that last verse in a minute because there are different ways to translate the Hebrew there and I actually would take a different translation than the RSV. Let's just walk through the passage and make a few points before we do that.

First, number 1; Again, Isaiah's describing a prophecy here of the New Jerusalem, in which the city of Jerusalem isn't just being depicted as a woman, the city's being depicted as a virgin bride of God himself, alright. So it's a powerful and beautiful

description of the city of Zion or the city of Jerusalem. You can see here that it's describing the wedding of Jerusalem and God because Jerusalem will be called by a new name and will have special clothing: the crown of beauty and the royal diadem. In other words, she's being dressed as a queen because she's being married to a king. And even to this day (well, not actually every case this day, but traditionally), when a man and woman got married, the woman would take a new name. She would take the name of her husband, that would become her name. Now it's going to have a just a little bit of a different context here in a second, but you can see, this is a "nuptial context", it's describing a wedding between Jerusalem and God.

You might be thinking, "what does that mean, a wedding?" Well, it's talking about the covenant between God and his people. Effectively, the people of Israel are being personified through the city of Jerusalem, which is itself personified as a woman. We still do this today, by the way, when we talk about a city as the "metropolis". That comes from the Greek word *mētrópolis*, "mother city", and we have this tendency even in English too, to use feminine imagery to depict certain things, like a city as a she, you can also depict a boat, which often will have a feminine name, that kind of thing. So it's a feminine personification of Jerusalem and of the people who are being united to God in a covenant, which is nuptial, which is marital. It describes the union between God and his people. Now, in this case though it is fascinating that God tells Israel, "I'm going to give you a new name," and then he lists several names here, I want to point these out because the Hebrew is fascinating. So when Isaiah says, "You shall no more be termed Forsaken", literally what he means is, You shall no more be named *Azubah* (forsaken), nor shall you be called desolated, *Shemamah* (which is a kind of funny sounding name in English), but rather you shall be called My delight is in her, *Hephzibah*, and married, *Beulah*. So, you can hear, in the Hebrew (in the English it sounds more like titles), but these are actually names. You will frequently find names in Hebrew ending in "A-H", especially these feminine names. So what God is saying is, your old name, the name for Jerusalem in a state of sin, was "forsaken" and "desolate", but your new name is going to be "My delight is in her" and "Married". *Beulah* means married.

So the very name of Jerusalem is now "The city of those who are married. The city who is married to God. The city who is married to her maker." That's why, if you look at the next verse, when it says, "As a young man marries a virgin", the better

translation is, "Your builder shall marry you." The Revised Standard Version says "Your son shall marry you", because there is an ambiguity between the Hebrew word for "builder" and "son", they're very similar. Son is *ben* and then *banah* can be a builder. So it's a little ambiguous in Hebrew as to whether you translate it "son" or "builder", but it really doesn't make much sense to say that her sons are going to marry her when the whole context is that her God is marrying her. And God is the "builder of Jerusalem", in fact there's even an illusion here to Eve in the Old Testament, because in the book of Genesis 2, when it says that God made a woman from the side of Adam, actually, the literal Hebrew is God built a woman from the side of Adam. God builds Eve, and God builds Jerusalem, and because God builds his people, the builder is going to marry the city.

and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,  
so shall your God rejoice over you.

That one's very clear, that The Lord is being depicted as the Divine Bridegroom who will marry his people in a new and everlasting covenant with them, which will not pass away. This is the marriage covenant of the new relationship between God and his people, and between Christ, the bridegroom, and the Church, as his bride, which is the new Jerusalem and the new Zion, the new bride of God.

Alright, with all that in mind then, if we look at the Psalm for today, in this case Psalm 96 isn't quite as explicit in the connections between old and new and acting as a bridge between the two, but I would highlight one verse, verse 9, in Psalm 96. It says:

Worship the LORD in holy array; tremble before him, all the earth!

Or some translations would say, "Worship the LORD in holy attire." What does that mean? Well it means clothing that is set apart, or that is holy, or that is special. So, you can see this for example in the temple. Whenever a Jewish priest would officiate in the temple, they couldn't just wear their ordinary clothing that they worked in the fields with, for example, they had to wear "holy attire", a holy clothing, clothing that was set apart, vestments, in other words, for their priestly activities. What the Psalm here is describing is, if you come into the temple of the Lord, your clothing should be holy. It should be set apart. It should look different because



you're in a different place. You're in a holy place that is set apart from sin, set apart from the world and set apart for God. And so, the same thing's true of a wedding. When you go to a wedding, you wear wedding clothes, right? The bride and the groom in particular wear kinds of vestments that are specific to the nuptial act. In fact, if you go back to ancient Israel, there was a custom that on the wedding day the bridegroom would dress in a priestly garment, a white vestment, and that the bride would dress in a garment that made her look like the new Jerusalem. In fact, the rabbi's would say that she would wear a crown, a golden crown on her head on day of the wedding, and that the crown would be decorated with the city of Jerusalem. So each Jewish man was like a new Adam, and each new bride was like a new Eve, actually even more, a new Jerusalem, because her crown would have an image of the city of Jerusalem on it. So, when they go to the nuptial ceremony, they would be wearing holy attire.

And just as a side note, this is one reason why in the history of the Church, it has always been customary, wherever possible, for a person to wear their Sunday best to Sunday mass, to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, because when you go to the Eucharistic celebration you are in fact, every time, going to a wedding. It's the wedding ceremony of Christ and the Church, it's the wedding feast, so to speak, of Christ and the Church. That's why when the priest says, "blessed are they who are called to the supper of the lamb", that's an allusion to Revelation 19, which in the Greek is, "Blessed are they who are called to the marriage supper of the lamb", the marriage "feast" of the lamb. That is what every Mass is. So it's fitting that we, especially for Sunday mass, which is the solemn weekly feast, that we would, if possible, wear our Sunday best, dressed in accordance with the reality we are encountering. We worship the Lord in holy attire. Now, I recognize, that in some cases, because of poverty or serious financial difficulty, a person may not have very many forms of clothing, and they might have to wear their common clothing, that's fine. Obviously, the same thing would have been true in first century times. But, if it is possible, to recognize that you're going to a wedding — nobody would go to a wedding just wearing their ordinary...same clothes they would wear to the beach, for example, leisure clothes — if it's possible to wear holy attire, it's fitting to the fact that you're going to the marriage of God and his people.

Alright, that's kind of a side note, but, I think it's important. So with all that mind then, what does the living tradition tell us about the wedding at Cana and the mys-

tery we're celebrating today? I'd like to end with two quotes, one from Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, he was a 4th century bishop of the church in Jerusalem. He's one of the doctors of the church, and one of my favorite early church fathers to read. If you want somebody who's easy to understand, interesting and super Catholic, go read Cyril of Jerusalem. And the second one is Augustine of Hippo, who is not easy to read, but who was also super Catholic. This is what they have to say about the wedding at Cana.

Jesus once in Cana of Galilee turned the water into wine by a word of command at Cana in Galilee. *Should we not believe him when he changes wine into his blood?* It was when he had been invited to an ordinary bodily marriage that he performed the wonderful miracle at Cana. Should we not be much more ready to acknowledge that to the “sons of the bridal chamber” he has granted the enjoyment of his body and blood?<sup>2</sup>

So notice, what is Cyril is saying there in the 4th century A.D.? If Jesus really changed water into wine in the sign at the wedding in Cana, then how much more should we believe that he actually changed wine into his blood when the real wedding came, when the real wedding feast came, which was the wedding feast of the Eucharist. So the wedding at Cana prefigures the miracle of transubstantiation, of the changing, the real changing of the bread and wine into the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. If you have a problem with the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, then you really need to go back to the wedding at Cana, because if you believe he performed that miracle of transformation, then why not believe that he performed the miracle of changing the bread and wine into his body and blood at the Last Supper.

And then finally, Augustine, St. Augustine, wonderful saint — was just teasing about him being too hard. Read him; start with *The Confessions*, that's a good place to start. He says this

Every celebration [of the Eucharist] is a celebration of Marriage; the

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<sup>2</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catechesis* 4:2

Church's nuptials are celebrated. The King's Son is about to marry a wife, and the King's Son [is] himself a King; and the guests frequenting the marriage are themselves the Bride...<sup>3</sup>

So, what's he saying there? That the congregation, the church, collectively constitute the bride at this nuptial banquet of the Eucharist, and that's why we need to keep it in mind that every mass we go to isn't just an obligation for us to attend, it is a celebration of the nuptial mystery of Christ's love for the Church, his bride.

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<sup>3</sup> Augustine, Homilies on 1 John 2:12-17