

The 2nd Sunday of Year C: Beginnings – we use what we can.....

First Reading: Isaiah 62:15: A fresh start for Jerusalem & God's People;

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11: We all have gifts – so use them!

Gospel: John 2:1-12: The Wedding Feast at Cana: Jesus makes a start.

We are now back to ordinary 'Sundays of the Year' – those weeks outside the main liturgical seasons when we use green vestments in church. Most of Year C's gospels are from St Luke, but (just to prove me wrong?) this weekend we start our Lord's public life with a story from St John – the famous Wedding Feast at Cana in Galilee. As I mentioned last week, the Church has traditionally seen this as one of the events that 'introduced' Jesus to the public – along with the Epiphany and his Baptism. Here, the 'public' were his new band of "disciples" – an unspecified number of people who had begun to follow him as their rabbi, or religious teacher. The way St John tells the story, Our Lady seems to have been a special guest, and "*Jesus was also invited to the wedding with his disciples*". Were they an afterthought? Who knows?

Unlike the other evangelists, John does not describe Jesus' baptism, but he does relate the message John the Baptist gave about Jesus. This led to some of John's followers attaching themselves to Jesus, and they (with others joining them) were the group who were invited to the Cana wedding. What follows is, to be blunt, basically a nature miracle – but one with deep spiritual meaning. This is true of almost every sentence in this 4th gospel. I do recommend that you read the Cana story– either in the Bible or in a post-1970 missal.

The first thing we notice is that the lack of wine is mentioned to Jesus by Mary. Jesus' reply is most odd – unless you read deeply into it – "*Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.*" Calling one's mum "Woman" at first sounds rude, but in St John's style, it probably refers to God making Adam a new 'helpmate' (called a 'woman') in Genesis 2:21-23 – so Jesus sees his mother as a "New Eve" – a fresh start for all of us. His "Hour" is a main theme in this gospel: it means the moment of the climax to his life – his loving death on the cross, and then the resurrection. Mentioned several times in this gospel, "his hour" comes across as a plan determined by God the Father, which even Jesus had to obey. In fact, we could say that Jesus' Cana miracle 'kick-started' a public life that would lead inexorably to his death & resurrection. (So, his 'hour' was, in effect, already here.) Afterwards, the village wedding had an extra 1,000 pints of wine, and so Mary's request to Jesus was answered in a way no-one could have imagined...an alcoholic's paradise.....?

More seriously, John writes: *“This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee; he manifested his glory. And his disciple believed in him”*. The “signs” in this gospel mean a small number of miraculous events that show both Jesus’ divine power & purpose in being here – how he helps us spiritually. Most readers will see Mary’s influence over her son, the Eucharistic symbolism of the “wine” and Jesus’ authority over nature as those spiritual helps. The “glory” meant his hidden divine power and link with the Father. Oddly, his greatest show of ‘glory’ would not be a ‘miracle’, but his death for all of us. So, in this strange way, St John shows Jesus’ public life to be well & truly started.

The other two readings also mention fresh starts – of a sort. The prophet Isaiah looks forward to a new beginning for Jerusalem (and with it, all God’s people), comparing it to a young woman being married. (That links up with the Cana story). However, I feel that the second reading is more relevant to us just now: St Paul speaks of each person having special gifts or talents, meant to be used for others’ benefit. If you have access to this passage, please do read it.

I think Paul has two lessons for all of us. The first is the need for unity. Our ‘gifts’ or ‘talents’ are not to be an ego-trip for people in the church/parish community: that would be arrogant and selfish. They are meant to be things that we use to serve others, to help them to reach our Lord by faith. Most active Church people are not ordained, so we clergy must recognize that we need each other, both to spread the gospel, and to attract people to our worship – whether new people to try it, or older ones to come back, after a period away.

Paul’s second lesson for me is a sense of purpose. Growing older, we may ask “Why bother?” The answer: the Holy Spirit calls all of us to build up the Church. At the public level, this is to preach the gospel & help faith, since, without some faith, a sacrament (even the most perfect liturgy!) has little effect. At the personal level, it means helping others to meet Jesus in a private faith – thus making the public ‘faith out there’ part of their own, individual lifestyle. This was always a challenge for RE teachers at high school, as the childhood religion of earlier years has to develop into a more adult, personal choice. Many never make this, and abandon religion in mid-teens; others do make it, and (perhaps after rocky patches) find a deep, adult faith that helps them. If we want people to “believe in Jesus”, as the disciples did at the end of the Cana story, I think we need to pool all our talents. *Fr Jim Dunne.*