

EPIPHANY 2 -2021
Isaiah 62:1-5
1 Cor 6:13-15;17-20
Jn 2:1-11

In recent times the secular understanding of marriage has changed from being the loving union of one man and woman which signified the marriage between Christ and his Church to the union of two adult persons on the view that love is love.

Alongside the prophets Hosea, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the prophet Isaiah's image of God's purpose for the restoration of unity between himself and his people is that of a marriage that is spiritual as well as physical in how it is lived. It is no accident that the Book of Revelation likens the bliss of the heavenly banquet as a marriage between Jesus, the Lamb of God and his righteous, faithful disciples in his Church.

It is also no accident that St John records Jesus beginning his ministry as a guest at a village wedding in Cana of Galilee. This is the background against which we are to understand the mission of Jesus in John's gospel. Jesus came to consummate the union between heaven and earth, between things spiritual and temporal and between God and his people through revealing God's glory. To underline the point, John said this earthly wedding occurred on the third day and he ends his gospel on the third day in the Garden of the Resurrection when the marriage of unity between all things heavenly and earthly is consummated.

At the wedding in Cana they ran out of wine. No wine, no wedding is the Jewish way. Mary presented the situation to Jesus. She didn't tell him what to do but left it with him and told the servants to do whatever he told them. That is the model of intercessory prayer we should follow – place our concerns in God's hands and let him deal with it.

Jesus tells the servants to fill the water jars used for the purification rite at weddings, with water. In St John's gospel water is a symbol that points to the marriage of flesh and spirit. He talks of wells, springs, pools, lakes, rivers and water jars leading up to the water and blood flowing from the side of the crucified Jesus. Here water is a symbol of raw human nature and the blood is the wine of the Heavenly banquet. Both pour from the side of the crucified Christ, and like love, our transformation when in normal times, we receive the consecrated bread and mix of water and wine during communion. Transformation isn't complete until it is poured out through us disciples into the world through our living, preaching and service to grow God's kingdom. A life of prayer, worship, self-giving, love and evangelisation are all elements in the invitation to discipleship. If we choose to respond by accepting the invitation to be a disciple of Christ, this is how we must try to live.

The events that occurred in Cana were the first sign when Jesus revealed the glory of God. Not everyone recognises that glory, but St John tells us that the first disciples did. The word glory originally meant the weight and so the value of goods, like a shopkeeper using scales to calculate a price. The word also means the brightness of someone whose life shines so much that it is possible to identify who shines through him or her. Moses' face shone after

talking with God, as Jesus shone on the Mount of Transfiguration. Archbishop Rowan Williams recently said that Christians should not expect too much from trying to persuade non-believers to accept the power of the gospel. We should keep doing so to “keep a foot in the door” until a saint comes along. The radiant glory from a saintly person is far more effective than verbal persuasion. The effective turning point of recognition occurs when a doubter encounters a disciple who is a role model of holiness just as Jesus’ disciples did at the wedding.

Water became wine. Jesus said, “I am the Vine.” A vine draws water into itself and spreads new properties through it that are capable of producing something new, namely wine. The grapes grow on the branches and Jesus said that you and I are the branches. If we let God’s love spread through our human love we too will shine so that others will recognise who shines through us. We must allow God to turn the water of our human nature into wine fit for the heavenly banquet, and make sure it is full bodied shiraz, not pale rosé!

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