

Epiphany 3 Year B 2018 Cana of Galilee

Today's Gospel follows on immediately where we left off last week at the end of the first chapter of John's Gospel, on the last of a series of four days where we see different people responding to Jesus in different ways. Acknowledging him firstly, as John the Baptist says, as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and then, in the words of Nathanael, as 'Rabbi, Son of God – King of Israel.' Jesus responds to this by talking of heaven opening and angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man. As I said last week, Jesus through his life, passion death and resurrection will become Beth-el - the visible house of God – the Christ - the very gate of heaven made known within our humanity.

Today we have the very vivid account of a wedding feast at Cana. Following the extraordinary imagery of the previous chapter, we appear to be on much firmer ground today. However, all is not as it seems! Although people talk of Cana in specific terms, we cannot honestly be sure that the modern day *Kafr Kanna* near Nazareth is the same as the *Cana* mentioned in today's Gospel, although it is certainly visited by pilgrims, many of whom renew their marriage vows at the Franciscan Wedding Church. I believe that the wine trade is also brisk! However, we won't become too bogged down in the question place, because the importance of the account together with its place near the beginning of the Gospel are far more important. John writes to lead us on a journey of faith using many different layers of meaning than we first detect.

The Wedding at Cana is a threshold event. Not only does it stand at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, but it also tells of movement, of transition from one level of experience and one level of understanding to another for many of the characters who appear at this marriage celebration. There is movement- a shift in perception- which changes all present in some way or other.

A marriage is being celebrated - and that of itself speaks of change, of passing over into a new reality, a new identity, as man and woman become husband and wife, and two individuals become a single unit, a new creation- matter and spirit, earth and heaven. It speaks of coherence, of balance, of fullness and completion. Don't forget that our Scriptures end with the Book of Revelation and the vision of the bride – the Church- the Body of Christ- coming down out of heaven for the wedding feast of the Lamb – the Bridegroom – Jesus Christ.

At this wedding feast there is a shift in the disciples' perception of Jesus; an epiphany takes place for them. They see something in him which they haven't seen clearly before. As John puts it, 'they believed in him

Jesus also crosses a new threshold. He steps into public ministry, and engages directly with the human condition with all its awkwardness and uncertainties, its celebrations and aspirations, and its helplessness and vulnerabilities. He is present to it and in it, and in the

face of a 'dry' wedding feast (just imagine!), there is no drama- just the simple command to the servants - to fill the water jars with water up to the brim and then to draw some out and take it to the chief steward of the feast. Archaeology in the Holy Land tells us that such purification jars usually contained twenty or thirty gallons so imagine a huge volume of water which John calls us to conjure up in our mind's eye! Heavy (and puzzling) work for the servants, but they do what Jesus asks of them. For them too in this account there is an epiphany; something is given to them – perhaps some kind of insight or understanding. Whatever it was, John tells us, 'they knew.' In other words, they now knew something they had not known before.

But it is the figure of the mother of Jesus who is pivotal in the whole of this account. She is not named. She is simply the Mother - the one who brings forth natural life, the one who nurtures and sustains it. She does not take control. She simply points out that something is lacking, something is needed, 'They have no wine,' she says to Jesus. However, the pivotal phrase in the whole of this account is directed not just at the servants, but at anyone reading or hearing the Gospel. '**Do whatever he tells you,**' Mary says. Mary represents the figure of Wisdom, which in the Jewish tradition is both Child, Mother and Bride, and who gives to those who seek her out the water of wisdom to drink. (*Ecclesiasticus 15:3*)¹

And the outcome is astonishing when the servants do as Jesus tells them, because just when it seems the party is over there is an overflowing, super-abundance of wine, rich beyond compare. 'You have kept the good wine until now!' John's Greek indicates that the **now** really is **now**. Although Jesus has said, 'My hour has not yet come,' - in other words the fulness of the knowledge of his self-offering - yet there is *this* now. It is for this moment, this *now*, that resources are wonderfully provided – incomparable wine in huge measure.

What John the Gospel writer want us to understand is that by taking risks, in crossing thresholds ourselves, venturing into new possibilities of responding to God, then our transformation can begin and continue to come about. We are all invited to listen for the voice of true Wisdom, not *my* own voice of self-opinion and self-regard, but the humble wisdom of waiting upon GOD -allowing his silence to address and shape us. In the face of everyday life, we are invited to recognize and respond to the God whose epiphanies are not always obvious or unequivocal, but who both reveals and conceals himself in the plain facts and natural happenings of everyday life.

Transformation is what all human life looks to and is engaged upon. To be turned towards GOD, seeking to have the mind of Christ, wanting only what he wants for us and of us, asking him to perfect his gifts in us, and to renew and grow the true self of each one of us - that is how we are to cooperate with the business of our transformation. As John says in his first letter, '*Beloved, we are God's children now. It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*' (1 John 3:2)

¹ "With the bread of understanding shall she feed him, and give him the water of wisdom to drink."

This wonderful change is what the slightly mad 17th century poet Richard Crashaw had in mind when he composed a two-line couplet on the Wedding at Cana: *The shamefaced water saw its noble Lord - and blushed.*

May the overflowing of God's love within our lives renew us, and help us to ever seek transformation within the knowledge of the saving grace of Jesus Christ, who meets us today in bread and wine.

Collect: Almighty God, whose Son revealed in signs and miracles the wonder of your saving presence: renew your people with your heavenly grace, and in all our weakness sustain us by your mighty power; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever **Amen.**

Genesis 14:17-20

¹⁷ After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). ¹⁸ And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. ¹⁹ He blessed him and said, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; ²⁰ and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!' And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything.

Revelation 19:6-10

⁶ Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunder-peals, crying out, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. ⁷ Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; ⁸ to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure' — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. ⁹ And the angel said ^[a] to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' And he said to me, 'These are true words of God.' ¹⁰ Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, 'You must not do that! I am a fellow-servant ^[b] with you and your comrades ^[c] who hold the testimony of Jesus. ^[d] Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus ^[e] is the spirit of prophecy.'

John 2:1-10

2 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' ⁴ And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' ⁵ His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' ⁶ Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it. ⁹ When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.'