

Introduction to Readings

Today's readings are about beginnings, abundance and gifts. In the gospel, we heard about the beginning of the ministry of Jesus and the first of his great "signs." In the second reading, Paul spoke of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that we receive through the abundant generosity of Jesus.

Paul's letter to Corinthians

Paul tells the Corinthians, Paul that they need to realize that the gifts they have been given are given by the Holy Spirit and are not something they can claim as their own in a way that makes them better than others. Think about that.

The Holy Spirit gives a diversity of gifts and they are for the good of all-- not just the one who receives them. Consider what you bring to the Christian community. If you are a good lector, a talented musician, a compassionate listener, or a wise teacher-- you are blessed, but your gifts have not been given just to you for you alone. These are free gifts of the Holy Spirit given for the good of the entire community.

The community needs your unique gifts and talents. You don't completely own them. They are entrusted to you to share. Our gifts don't make us better than anyone else, they actually demand a great responsibility for using them wisely. Our attitude toward our gifts should be one of gratitude, because we have something to give for the benefit of all.

St. John's Gospel

In the gospel, we hear about the first of Jesus' signs in the insignificant town of Cana. Even today, as one travels north along the road in Galilee, Cana does not stand out as much more than a village of no great consequence. The Church of the Miracle, built by the Franciscans early in the 1800's, is about its only mark of distinction and is the primary goal of the many visitors or pilgrims who stop there.

This was one of the sites that my wife Kay and I visited, when we were on a pilgrimage to the Holyland in November. There is a wedding chapel in the church where many come to renew their marriage vows and we were privileged to do just that. This experience gave me a new appreciation for today's gospel.

At this time and place, Jesus has left home to start his public ministry. He has been to the Jordan and been baptized by John. (We celebrated the Lord's baptism at our liturgies last weekend if you remember.) Jesus has begun to gather together his disciples. His public commission at his baptism and his preparation in the desert are complete. Now, he has returned to his home town of Nazareth and will begin preaching the good news, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah.

Wedding Feast

When he returns home, he is invited to a wedding in the nearby village of Cana. Cana is just down the road--about 8 miles from Nazareth--a good, brisk half day walk. In Jesus' time, a wedding was a great social event (not so much different from weddings today)--family, friends, distant relatives, neighbors all were invited. It was a party, a good time, plenty of wine and good food, a reason to celebrate-- and the whole town turned out. Friends and family came from near and far.

According to the prevailing customs, the festivities began on the 3rd day of the week and lasted for 7 days. (How many families in this parish would want to foot the bill for a wedding that lasted 7 days?)

Jesus' presence at this wedding shows us that he moved, worked and interacted with the common people. He was not an ascetic who lived a reclusive life in the desert like John the Baptist nor did he retreat from society into a select community as did the Essenes. Instead, he went among the common people to care for their needs.

At a wedding celebration (such as in Cana) the reclining guests ate on floor mats and, in the course of the celebration, consumed large quantities of food and wine. There was rhythmic music and lively dancing. But when the festivities were in full swing at this wedding in Cana, the host ran out of wine! Imagine the implications. To run out of food or drink meant public disgrace and shame for the family. It would have been a huge embarrassment for the wedding party to discover that they had no more wine! How could such a thing have happened?

Jesus First Miracle

Mary, being the loving, caring, observant and compassionate woman that she is, is quick to notice that the wine has run dry, and she goes to Jesus for help. She has complete confidence in his ability to save face for the Bride and Groom.

But Jesus was not in charge; he is one of the guests and is not ready to take on the role of a miracle worker. Still, he is moved by compassion for the wedding couple and, in the end, rescues them and their families from a lifetime of shame and embarrassment.

At the request of his mother, Jesus performs an extraordinary act by changing 6 large jars of water into wine. This was his first public miracle. Still, not many knew that Jesus had performed a miracle--only his mother, his disciples and the servants at the wedding.

Although, there is some wonderment by the head waiter at the quality of the late wine, only his mother and his disciples are fully aware of this first sign that Jesus works. With this sign, the faith and devotion of his disciples grew. His action at Cana was a miraculous act of grace, and a blessing on the holy state of marriage. It showed that Jesus cared for the insignificant and is a sign of his marriage to all humanity.

This first of Jesus' public signs was a real acknowledgement of the kindness and thoughtfulness of his mother-- Mary our advocate. If he could not deny her compassionate request at the Marriage Feast of Cana, how can he deny our requests that come through her today?

This miracle was a sign to Jesus' disciples that he has something very important to teach them. It is a sign for us as well. It teaches us about sharing our gifts, about watching out for the needs of each other. It teaches us to honor marriage. It reminds us that Jesus loves all of us. It shows us that, from the very beginning of his public life, Jesus was there for others. Now it is **our responsibility** to follow in his mission. We can't turn water into wine, but we can be there for each other, encourage each other, and support one another on our spiritual journey

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