

Isaiah is not alone among the prophets in portraying our relationship to God in images of covenantal love. The prophet Hosea’s God will “betroth you to myself forever, with tenderness.” The prophet Ezekiel spins a marvelous tale of courtship, betrayal, and redemptive pardon to explain the history of God’s commitment to Israel.

But Isaiah goes beyond the others. He presents an outright celebration of nuptials: God’s relation to Israel, to us, is an undying covenant of love and fidelity. “You shall be called ‘My Delight,’ and your land, ‘Espoused.’” For the Lord delights in you, and makes your land his spouse. As a young man marries a virgin, your Builder shall marry you. As a bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so shall your God rejoice in you.”

God’s desire and delight is to be one with us, to share in our life and destiny as the traditional words of the vows spoken by the bride and groom at a wedding say, “for better; for worse”, to be one in the possession of the same Spirit of love in all the moments and circumstances of our life. It is that Spirit, St. Paul tells us today that we have been given in Christ and that unites us in body, worship, and common labors.

Given God’s eternal love for us, it might be more than happenstance that the first miraculous “sign” of Jesus recounted in the fourth Gospel occurs at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. His presence blesses the covenant of marriage, making of it a sacrament of the Church in which a man and a woman in their love and life-long commitment to each other incarnate the eternal love and committed relationship of God to us through Christ. At the same time, he also personally heightens the celebration. Prompted by his mother, who informs Jesus that there is no more wine and then alerts the attendants to do “whatever he tells you,” Jesus transforms six stone jars of water into wine.

Here is a further revelation of God’s plan for our salvation. On a physical level Jesus’ action saved the young couple from an embarrassing situation of running out of

wine at their wedding reception. But, like his presence at the wedding itself, the changing of the water into wine is also a “sign”. The prophet Isaiah in an earlier place in his writing describes the messianic day and era using the metaphor of a great banquet when God and his people would sit down to a table laden with “rich foods and choice wines, juicy rich food and pure choice wines” (Isa. 25:6). While water is a natural element of earth, making wine is a process of transformation. Something (grapes) start out being one thing, and end up being totally other (wine). With its natural effect of freeing its imbiber from normal inhibitions, the effect of wine was seen in the culture of the ancient world as a means of unlocking the divine spirit within a person providing a means of communion with divinity. In changing water into wine we have a sign: the union of divine life in Jesus with our human nature and the transformation of our humanity by divine grace into union with God.

In each Mass as the deacon or priest prepares the chalice of wine which will become the Blood of Christ in Eucharist, as a little water is added to it he prays: “***By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.***” In each Mass the “sign” of Cana is made present for us! In each reception of Holy Communion our life is taken up once again into the life of Christ! In each Mass we experience God marrying us!

In the Gospel of John, signs are powerful deeds, but they do not guarantee faith on the part of those who witness them (12:37). To understand a sign, one must be open to it, one must see through the event to its deeper meaning. This requires faith. In his presence at Cana, in changing water into wine, Jesus offers us the sign of himself—of his outpoured love for us. Now he challenges us to likewise allow ourselves to be changed, to be poured out in love in commitment to God and in self-emptying love in the everyday events and actions of our lives with the people we encounter.