

As we enter Ordinary Time, we are given to ponder Jesus' first miracle as recorded in St. John's Gospel. St. John calls miracles "signs" because they signify something deep and meaningful, they aren't just random cool things the Lord does to dazzle us. But of all the miracles that Jesus worked, this might be considered the strangest to start with, the Lord turning lots of water into good wine at a wedding party, about 180 gallons! This miracle seems more like a luxury item compared to the gravity of the others. If you had the choice between being cured of blindness or leprosy or having another glass of good wine at a wedding, which would you choose?

There is much symbolism in this event showing that the new and eternal covenant in Christ's blood fulfills and surpasses what has come before. The changing of water into wine foreshadows the changing of bread and wine into His body and blood in the Eucharist. We also see the important place that Mary plays in salvation history and in our lives. St. John reports Mary, here and at the cross, as so influential an intercessor, she's our mother too who cares about the most personal details of our lives.

These are important things but there is something else very important I would like to focus on today with this generous act of God. The Lord wants to show His totally gracious, overabundant love for us! The first miracle reminds us that everything good is a gift from God. In this miracle of turning water into wine at a wedding party, we see the Lord's playfulness, His joy, the lightness of His spirit that is still there even in this fallen world.

Parties, social time with people or playing together is an end itself. It reminds us of heaven. Much of this life is filled with the drudgery of survival, that's what God said would happen after the fall. We must work and so often we look forward to work being over, whatever that looks like. Work is usually a means to an end, but playful, social things are ends in themselves. Our relationship with God works that way, prayer and the liturgy are ends in themselves, where we grow in communion with the Lord.

Even in the face of this fallen world, its sufferings and trials, the Lord is not overwhelmed, loves us, and passes that on to us. Even though Satan and forces of evil are at work, they have lost the war. The Lord's first miracle of turning water into wine reminds us of the life of heaven when there will only be love, Communion and celebration, and no more suffering, tears or sickness. The joy of that future promise can be with us now.

A favorite image of Jesus for many people is the laughing Christ, or images that show the Lord happy. Truth be told the Gospels tell stories where Jesus shows virtually every emotion, sadness, pity, love, anger, exasperation, tenderness but joy, laughing, or lightness is more indirect. G.K. Chesterton noted:

"There was some one thing that was too great for God to show us when He walked upon our earth; and I have sometimes fancied that it was His mirth."

Now, a reason why we don't see more of Christ's joy and mirth in the Gospels might be that we are still in the time of trial and carrying our crosses. Too much wine and distraction could keep us from responding with purpose to the Lord's call. Throughout the Gospels the Lord is focusing us on what we're less inclined to. We naturally desire comfort, rest, pleasure, and so forth but need to learn more about how love is manifested through discipline, obedience, fidelity, and sacrifice. We're not in heaven yet. But indirectly throughout the Gospels and in today's miracle we see the underlying goodness, love, and joy of God.

Keep the faith,

Fr. Mike

