

Prayer

When my parents were planning their wedding (mind you, I wasn't there, but this is what I've heard) it was apparently the custom back then in St. Louis that the time of the ceremony was very carefully chosen.

The idea was to time it just so – ideally late in the afternoon – so that those who wanted to attend just the reception and not bother with the wedding itself, could still enjoy their Saturday. Nobody, after all, wanted something as minor as a church ceremony to interfere with important things, like golf or shopping.

The wedding reception, on the other hand was another story altogether. Nobody wanted to miss a good party! Well, every time I hear the story from today's Gospel reading, I think about wedding customs – such as they were – back in my home town of St. Louis. And one thing that strikes me is that the wedding in Cana of Galilee, much like weddings a while back in St. Louis of Missouri doesn't focus a lot on the wedding itself.

I find it quite fascinating that in today's Gospel story, we don't even know who the bride was – or the groom, for that matter – and the actual wedding – presumably the religious part of the event – is never even mentioned.

I find that monumentally surprising – perhaps not so much about my parents' wedding, but certainly at an occasion at which Jesus is present. Something else I find surprising – at least in the story of the wedding in Cana is the utter extravagance of what Jesus did.

There were, we are told, six stone jars, each containing 20 or 30 gallons. The math isn't that tough; Jesus provided at least 120 gallons of wine! And since there are 4 quarts to a gallon, and each quart yields – say – 6 glasses, we're talking about close to 3,000 glasses of wine.

Now I'll grant that back in those days, wedding festivities usually lasted several days, often as long as a week. But Cana, the town where the wedding occurred, was little more than a wide place in the road, so even if

the whole village showed up and did party for several days, that's a lot of wine for a lot of people.

So, what are we to make of all that? What are we to make of Jesus performing his very first miracle at a wedding for two people whose names we don't even know and where the ceremony itself claims no attention whatever?

Is the point that God cares more about parties than about solemn religious ritual? that God is more concerned with how a party is catered than about saying our prayers? I expect not.

I expect instead that one point of this strange story is that God's miraculous work can happen any where and any time, even at a wedding reception in a wide place in the road in the middle of who knows where, and that no situation – large or small – is beyond the reach of God's extravagant love and care.

And what are we to make of Mary's role in this event? When the first batch of wine gave out, Mary said to Jesus: 'they have no wine'. To our ears, Jesus' reply might sound a little sharp: 'hush, Mom, the timing's not right'.

Is the point that it's O.K. for children to be rude to their parents? I expect not. But when Mary said to Jesus: 'they have no wine', she was neither passing judgment on the planning abilities of the bride and the groom, nor was she hinting to her son in nagging kind of way, the way we might say: 'honey, the garbage is piling up'. Neither, however, was she making a simple observation.

At that particular moment in time, her son's identity as the Messiah was not yet known. Mary, however, believed that her son Jesus had the power to do something about the situation. So when Mary said to Jesus, 'they have no wine', she was making her own statement of faith.

Mary didn't nag Jesus or try to tell him what to do. She simply offered the situation into the hands of Jesus, with love and trust and expectation and belief that He could and would do something about the situation at hand.

She was saying that she had faith in Jesus, and that's a really important point: Mary's radical faith in this young man named Jesus. And on top of

that, Mary then delivered one of the best lines in Holy Scripture. Turning to the servants, she said about Jesus: ‘do whatever He tells you’.

Do whatever Jesus tells you – no matter what he tells you – is an all-but-engraved invitation not only to radical faith, but also to radical obedience. And it wasn’t just those disciples to whom Jesus spoke, but to us disciples, too. Radical faith and radical obedience: that’s the invitation we hear through Mary on that day at the wedding at Cana.

And the purpose behind that invitation, it seems to me, to radical faith and radical obedience is that God, through Christ, intends great transformation. And the transformation isn’t just about transforming water into wine, it’s about the transformation of the whole world.

At the wedding at Cana of Galilee, ordinary water became precious wine. The common became quite uncommon, and that’s the pattern of the transforming work of Jesus. And the same power that changed water into wine can also transform lives, turning the common into the uncommon and making the ordinary quite precious.

We too are invited to the party. We are invited not only to be transformed by that divine power, but also to be agents of God’s transforming power. Exactly how each of us ends up fulfilling our role as God’s agent varies from person to person. There are, as we are reminded in today’s Epistle reading varieties of gifts and talents.

But no matter what particular gifts and talents we have, we are all invited to offer to God any situation we may confront. They have no wine. My friend has no job; I lied to my boss; my mother is sick; there is war and poverty and addiction and death. Here is it, Lord.

And then, like Mary, we are challenged to have faith that God cares enough to respond – and respond extravagantly – thousands-of-glasses-of-wine type extravagance. God can transform loss, pain, betrayal, boredom, sinfulness – whatever we bring to be transformed. No situation is beyond the reach of God’s extravagant love, care, concern, and transforming power. After all, if God could transform Christ’s horrible death on a Cross to the saving event of the whole world, surely nothing is beyond God’s care and concern and power.

And just as Jesus was sent to Cana in Galilee to transform ordinary water into exquisite wine, Jesus is also sent to Old Lyme, Connecticut to do the same thing. And we are invited to be as trusting as Mary and challenged to be as obedient as those first disciples. Here it is, Lord, I am ready to do whatever you tell me.

At that week-long wedding in Cana of Galilee, there were probably lots of guests who didn't even know what had happened – people who weren't even aware of the miracle right in their midst. How sad for those people. Don't you just know that Mary and the disciples had a much better time at that wedding!

So we, who do know the miracle that is Jesus Christ, are invited not only to be trusting and obedient, but also to tell the world about God's transforming power. God expects us to lay the common before Him and to pledge our faithful obedience, and to watch what happens – to watch the ordinary become precious – and then to tell the world what we know.

God's miraculous work can happen any where and any time – at a wedding in Cana, or St. Louis, or Old Lyme – and no situation is beyond the reach of God's love, beyond the reach of God's care and concern, or beyond the reach of God's transforming power.

And who knows, the feast may last not just a week, but for all eternity!
Amen.