

**Sunday 24 January 2021**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Epiphany**

## **Reflection on John 2.1-12 - turning water into wine.**

Gospel of John is significantly different from the other three Gospels. John wants to draw our attention to the faith, "these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God" (John 20.31).

So, John's Gospel wants to be and is the Book of Revelation and the Book of Faith – the perfect Epiphany Book. Probably, for this reason, it has been named as the Spiritual Gospel in the early Church.

John places his story of Jesus' life in the framework of the seven "signs" and his seven "I Am" statements: "I Am the Bread of Life", "I Am the Light of the World", "I Am the Door", "I Am the Good Shepherd", "I Am the Resurrection and the Life", "I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life", and "I Am the True Vine".

Of course, we can ask, why is the number seven so significant?

There are many references to the number seven in the Bible. Seven is the number of completeness, holiness, infinity and divine perfection and is mentioned at least 490 times. Seven entitled God and everything that is not temporal. Seven defines something that does not belong to the earthly order.

The same applies to the "signs" placed in the first part of John's Gospel, which is sometimes called "The Book of Signs".

Of course, we must admit that in John's Gospel, there are a total of 8 signs, seven public and one private. The eighth sign is the Resurrection. And it is logical and understandable because the number 8 - in the prophetic tradition - means a "new life," "resurrection," a new beginning.

So, when Mark, Matthew and Luke talk about miracles, John - about signs (Greek *sêmeia*). In John, the deeds of Jesus are signs. Jesus' actions indicate what is placed beyond the miraculous event itself. A historical event becomes a sign and refers us to a spiritual truth that cannot be directly expressed because it belongs to a different dimension.

The first sign in John's Gospel is what happened at the wedding at Cana in Galilee (John 2.1-11) - turning water into wine.

The first sign of Jesus took place in Galilee, in the land of darkness (Isaiah 9.2). Galilee did not have an outstanding reputation because no prophet ever comes from Galilee! (John 7.52). And in such a place not only the greatest Prophet is revealed, but God himself.

Jesus had recently been baptised by John the Baptist in the River Jordan and then spent 40 days in the wilderness. Now he takes a trip to a fishing village between three and nine miles from Nazareth, depending on locations.

Jesus, His family and friends, were invited to a wedding.

Jesus takes part in the wedding feast to bless and sanctify with his presence the feast of human love. But for us, it is also crucial that in the New Testament, the happiness of messianic times is comparable to the joy of a wedding.

The wedding ceremony in Israel at that time were steeped in tradition and ritual. It could last several days, especially if the guests made long journeys on foot from distant places. This fact may justify the bride and groom's passivity and those responsible who on the third wedding day did not notice that they have no wine.

What a disaster! It would have pretty serious consequences. Damaged the new couple's reputation and shamed their families and host.

It was a family responsibility to provide the food, wine, and provision for stay-over. Some families would save for years to make this happen and be a blessed event.

In particular, the wine was an essential part of the wedding feast. Wine has always been a sign of blessing and prosperity, a symbol of joy and love. Wine in the Old Testament, along with wheat and oil, was the most important food source and is considered God's gift. Many Old Testament prophets also mentioned wine as an essential element of the messianic banquet (Amos 9.13-14; Joel 2.24; Isaiah 25.6).

When the wine gave out, Mary said to Jesus, "They have no wine." Jesus' response to her ("Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.") sounds rude and harsh to us, but that is not the intention of these words. Jesus' answer is an expression taken from the diplomatic language of the time and essentially encourages reflection. It means expressing the difference concerning the specific reality that two people face.

It is difficult to say whether Mary understood the meaning of Jesus' words. But she certainly trusted. Mary does not ask Jesus for any explanation but takes action. She turns to the servants: "Do whatever my Son tells you." She is sure that "whatever" Jesus says will be right, optimal, best.

Mary is the first to notice the lack of wine. The people she belongs to suffer from a lack of love. The empty stone jars - a symbol of the Old Covenant written on stone tablets - are renewed when they are refilled.

We know the jars were empty. They were empty, like an expectation that had not yet met the expected, like the commandment of love that had not been fulfilled, like a covenant broken by sin, like a bride without a bridegroom.

These jars remind us that someone can keep the Law in all regulations, yet still not have the joy, the love carried by the Bridegroom.

The jars are empty - they are deprived of what they were meant to be used for: they are without water. And Jesus asks the servants to fill them.

It is not a sign of creation "out of nothing." Jesus transforms water. Water - the first element of creation and an essential component of life - becomes the "good wine". Through the gift of wine, Jesus shows that He comes to give joy. The life to which Jesus invites us is the way of joy, celebration, and endless love. And as long as we don't see it, we are like that water that has not yet become wine.

This sign that Jesus made was not necessary; it did not save a person's life or health, unlike others. But it was a miracle that was very clear. The other signs made by Jesus were somehow based on the normal processes of nature, correcting them, inverting them, making them richer - so it was with the feeding of the 5,000, with the healings, even with the restoration of life. Only in this sign, the very molecular structure was changed. And Jesus uses these to point to and prove His glory and power. In everyday things, Jesus revealed his glory.

According to Jewish tradition, the Bridegroom was responsible for enough wine for the feast. So, if Jesus takes care of the wine at this wedding, he acts like the Bridegroom.

Jesus is coming as the Bridegroom to his beloved bride, humanity. Jesus is coming to you and me to show that each of us is called to a wonderful feast with the best food and the finest wine.

Through that sign at Cana in Galilee, in the land of darkness, Jesus expresses his divinity and power and invites each of us to enter a new space of faith in which the longing for true love and happiness is fulfilled.