

## The Wedding Feast at Cana

God acts in human history, and those actions reveal, a little at a time, who God is. This month we focus on the fact that God, in the Second Person of the Trinity, chose a family wedding to be the setting in which he would go public with his ministry. Jesus' sign of turning water into wine began to reveal his glory and the extravagance of his love, which would be fully revealed on the cross. Further, the story is filled with multiple images, rich layers of symbols and allusions to the story of Israel's relationship with the Lord and to her hopes.

Right at the start, John signals that this is more than a story about a simple wedding in a small out-of-the-way village in Galilee. The phrase "on the third day" anchors this story in Israel's story. "The third day" calls to mind the three-day covenant-making ceremony recounted in Exodus 19— in which God gives the Commandments to his chosen people.

Jesus counters his mother's simple request to help with an embarrassing problem, "They have no wine," with a cryptic comment: "Woman, what is it to me and to you? My hour has not yet come." Mary, who sang during her pregnancy of the promises God had made to her ancestors (Luke 1:55), would have longed for the divine Bridegroom to fulfill those ancient promises made by the prophets. So, it would not be surprising if Mary knew full well that what she was asking Jesus to do was more than to solve a simple domestic problem.

Jesus, steeped in the prophets as well, would have heard in Mary's "simple" observation about wine the echoes of Isaiah 24:7–11: "The wine dries up. . . . All joy has reached its eventide." He would have known that in this passage, all of Israel was expressing its thirst, its longing for the banquet of the Messiah to begin (Isaiah 25). All of Israel was longing for the superabundant wine of Amos 9:11, when the hills would run with wine, or of Joel 3:18 ("in that day, the mountains shall drip sweet wine"). Israel was longing for the wine of the Day of the Lord. And now his mother, daughter of Israel, was expressing this too.

So, Jesus would have heard in Mary's request an intense longing for the wine of the Messiah. But his words to her show that he also knew this was not the right time, not the right wedding. His "hour," the great consummation on the Cross of his love for us, had indeed not yet arrived. At that greater wedding, on the third day, Jesus would reveal his resurrected glory, the glory of the Father's only Son (John 1:14).

Still, here at Cana, he did perform a sign that participated in and pointed to that great day. The act of providing wine at a simple wedding was preparing his disciples, and us, for his own wedding day. In this greater wedding, the wine of salvation would be poured out for the salvation of all humankind.

As you reflect on the various elements of this remarkable story, allow it to challenge you as a couple. It is a story full of hope for all married couples—even for those of us who

have what we would consider a “good marriage.” There is always the danger that what happened at Cana can happen in our marriage. We began with great enthusiasm and were filled with joy. But we all know that time and life’s challenges weigh on us, sometimes very heavily. There can come a time, for all of us, when it could be said, “They have no wine.” When that happens, sadness and boredom have descended. We can fall into numbing routines. Love becomes a chore, and joy is lacking.

At those times, we can invite Jesus to come to our wedding. We can ask him to repeat the miracle of Cana for us. He can turn the water of routine, of frigidity, into the wine of love and joy that is even better than the initial love and joy, just like the miraculous wine at Cana.

This set of reflections ends with two that are intimately tied to the sign of Cana: a reflection on John 13, when the hour to which Jesus alluded to in John 2:4 arrives., and one on John 19, when Jesus drinks the last cup of wine just before he dies.

Welcome to the feast!