“The Wedding Gift”

This Episode of the Chose covers two very important Gospel Stories. The story of Jesus being “Lost” in the temple for 3 days Luke 2:41-50 and the Wedding Feast at Cana John 2:1-12. It is interesting in many ways for these two stories to be covered in one episode because the first one of Jesus being Lost in the Temple is the last time we hear of Joseph in the scriptures and the Wedding Feast at Cana, only recorded by John, captures the last spoken words of Mary the Mother of Jesus.

Luke 2:41-50

Fulton Sheen, in his excellent book about Mary, The World's First Love, says that God, in His perfect providence, deliberately provided this suffering in Mary's life, losing Jesus, the most precious thing in her life and the most precious thing in the world, for three days-so that she, like Christ, could experience every human suffering, every effect of sin, even though she was innocent of sin, as Jesus was. Was Jesus lost to His Father for the three days of His Passion and death; as He was also lost to His mother for three days in this Gospel.

Mary is not just Jesus' mother; she is also our mother, for Jesus Himself gave her to us from the cross when He said to John, “Behold, your mother,” and said to Mary, "Behold, your son” (John 19:26-27). John was the only

one of Jesus' disciples who remained faithful to Jesus to the end and who was with Jesus at the cross when He died. So, in saying that to John, Jesus said it to all His faithful disciples, since John constituted 100 percent of that group at that time. So, if we are part of that group if we are faithful disciples of Jesus, if we want to remain with Him wherever He is, even on the cross then that was said to us also. Jesus gave us the wonderful gift of His mother Mary to be our mother, and He gave His mother Mary the gift of us to be her children.

Mary has many, many children. When she was assumed into heaven, she did not lose them or her love for them. She is our mother, she cares for us, and she cares about us, and she suffers disappointment whenever we sin and rejoices whenever we trust and obey and love. It matters to her even when we are lost for three minutes, much less three days, because everything in the lives of her children matters to a mother.

When God lets us suffer, as He let Mary suffer for those three days, we naturally ask Him why He did that. Mary did the same. When she found Jesus, she asked Him, “Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety. "And His reply to her is also His reply to us when we ask Him the same question: “Did you not know that I must be in my

Father's house?” In other words, didn't you know that my Father is perfect, and His providential plan for your life is perfect, including the very suffering you are now going through? Did you not know that the whole world is my Father's house, my Father's kingdom? Did you not know that He makes all things work together for good, even terrible things, for those who love him? (Rom.8:28). We do know that by faith. But we do not usually feel it. Faith is a knowing, whether or not it is accompanied by feeling. That knowing, that faith, does not make the suffering disappear. But it does make it meaningful, like the pains of childbirth. By faith and hope a pregnant mother sees her unborn child becoming an adult, and that is so precious that it more than makes up for the very serious pains of labor. Christ came into the world not to make our sufferings disappear but to make them appear different, to make them appear as they are as meaningful, as powerful, as worth something precious, as something like the pains of childbirth. How can that be? How can the pains that we suffer be like childbirth? What “child” do we give birth to when we suffer? What does that mean? It means that if we suffer in faith, hope, and love, trusting in God as our loving heavenly Father, then the “child” that we give birth to is ourselves, our future selves, our new better version of ourselves, our

stronger selves, our holier selves, our more faithful and faith-filled selves.

We can all remember some suffering in our past that we did not feel was helpful in any way; something that did not feel like childbirth but more like death, but something that we now can look back on and say, truly, that it made us stronger and better and wiser and humbler and more courageous. Mary must have felt exactly that years later when she remembered these three days' suffering from the loss of her son. In fact, that's what the text itself suggests when it says she “kept all these things in her heart.” Memory is like soil; it makes things grow, and the thing it makes grow most is yourself, your character.

You can learn from your past, especially your past sufferings, even those sufferings that were the result of your own faults, your own sins. Learning from your past is a good preparation for your future, both your earthly future your increase in wisdom and patience and holiness and your heavenly future your perfection in heaven. Every sorrow on earth, and every joy, can be soil or fertilizer for the plant of your true self, which will be transplanted to heaven when you die. That is one of the reasons why, in your morning offering, you offer God “all my prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of this day.”

Mary did that. Learn from your mother. The Church calls her the “Seat of Wisdom.”

We fast forward to The Wedding Feast at Cana John 2:1-12

John is the only one of the four Evangelists who recounts the story or the Wedding Feast at Cana, the first public miracle.

It begins at a wedding feast. Wedding feasts often lasted seven days in that culture. They took both marriage and the celebration of it much more seriously than we do. Mary was there but not Joseph, which means that he must have died sometime in the eighteen-year period between this wedding, which was the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, at age thirty, and the last time we hear of Joseph, when Jesus was twelve and was left behind in the Jerusalem temple for three days.

It was a terrible embarrassment for the host of a wedding celebration to run out of wine. Mary approaches Jesus about it, which means that she must have known His ability to perform miracles. But He had not yet done any in public, since He had not planned to begin his public ministry yet.

That is itself a remarkable and telling fact: that He delayed His three-year-long public ministry until He was

thirty. It took Him ten times more time to prepare His work than to do it. Any painter understands that. So does any organizer and planner of any feast, Thanksgiving dinner, or conference. The silent years in Jesus' life are as essential as the years we know about.

Mary's plea to Jesus to solve the embarrassing problem of running out of wine is a perfect example of feminine diplomacy. She does not tell Him what to do. She does not argue. She does not plead. She does not hector or hassle Him. She does not put a guilt trip on Him. She simply tells Him the fact: "They have no wine.” Such a prayer shows great faith. She does not add anything to the simple fact that they have no wine because she knows Jesus well. She knows his compassion. She must have given Him a knowing look that was far more eloquent than a million words. Women know how to do that much better than men do. We all know that's true, even though it's no longer politically correct to say that.

Jesus' first response tests her faith. It's essentially, "That may be your problem, but it's not mine." She does not take that as His final answer. She knows Him too well for that. Her response is not to come back at Him with an argument but to simply assume that His eventual answer will be the opposite of what He said to her; that He will indeed see this as His problem, not just hers. He will see

it as His precisely because it is hers. He knows that too. He knows her so well that He knows how well she knows Him. No one in all the universe knows Jesus better than His mother.

The fact that Jesus alters His plans to begin His public ministry because of Mary's gentle intercession should give us immense confidence in Mary's power of prayer. Mary can intercede for us to Jesus! He's the Lord of the universe, but Mary is the mother of the Lord of the universe.

What Mary says next is not said to Him. She knows that there is no more need for conversation between them. She knows she doesn't need to try to change His mind. She needs to change the minds of the waiters at the feast. So, she gives them the best commandment anybody ever gave anybody, the very best advice in the whole world, the advice that summarizes and contains absolutely everything in the life of a Christian in one short sentence: “Do whatever he tells you." Those are Mary's last recorded words. John records them because He knows that they are not just for the waiters at the feast but for all Christians, for the whole Church and every single individual in it down to the end of time. It is the only advice that no one can ever possibly go wrong in following. It is the whole meaning of life, and it is the

secret of becoming a saint: simply obeying this one commandment, saying to the man who was and is God, “Thy will be done,” with all your heart and soul and mind and strength.

And the result, is the first of Jesus' many public miracles, turning water into wine. The word translated "miracle" means literally “sign." The word “sign” is the first part of the word "significance." Miracles have significance. They are like words: they mean something beyond themselves. They point. They point to Jesus and to His power to do anything. They invite us to put all our faith in Him, for He is God, and “for God all things are possible" (Matt.19:26).

All His miracles do something apparently impossible, something like turning water into wine. In some way, they turn a situation around, turning worse into better, turning a before into an after, turning empty into full, turning not enough into enough.

And more than just enough: as the headwaiter marvels to the bridegroom, “You have kept the good wine until now." He doesn't just restore the lost situation; He makes it better than it ever was.

God does that to us too. He keeps the best till last. When you die you will see something infinitely more beautiful than you ever saw before, something that no one can put

into words, something St. Paul describes in these words: “'What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, / and what has not entered the human heart, / what God has prepared for those who love him,' / this God has revealed to us through the Spirit”(1 Cor.2:9-10).

As you minister to others as The Order of Malta these lessons, we have received in the Gospels portrayed in this Episode of the Chosen help us perhaps understand suffering a little more which will help us help others with their sufferings. We see the effects of the miracles Christ performs every day in our lives and those of others if we pay close attention His grace and the guidance of the Holy Spirit is ever present making things better than they were before just like in the turning of water into wine.

Take away from our talk at the lounge. We are all called to serve and get out of our comfort zone.

“If not now when, if not you who” – Deacon Victor Pimental