

Monsignor Dennis Sheehan
Homily Given on January 21, 2007
2nd Sunday of Ordinary Time – Liturgical Year C

Today we pause to proclaim this Cana story. For the rest of our Sundays this year, we'll hear the Gospel of Luke. But today we interrupt the regular program to hear again the story of Jesus' first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It's a strange way to begin a Gospel story. In Mark, Jesus' first miracle is casting out a demon. In Luke, Jesus starts with a sermon in the synagogue. Why does St. John's Gospel start out with Jesus providing wine for a party? It doesn't seem... well, it doesn't seem significant enough.

That might be our modern point of view. But in Jesus' time, wedding parties – if you can imagine it – were even more of a big deal than they are today. For one thing, a local wedding was everyone's primary source of entertainment. This is the age before the Super Bowl, before computer games, even before TV and movies. And weddings, remember, didn't last a few hours. A wedding in Jesus' neighborhood went on for seven days. Seven days of wine, food, dancing, and music. That's "party-hearty" for you.

Then, too, this is a culture where being shamed as a poor host or hostess is a real disaster. Running out of wedding wine was no small gaffe. Fifty years later, some grey-haired geezer will whisper: "I remember: He ran out of wedding wine."

So Mary apparently spots the problem. When Jesus shrugs her off, she still has confidence. He'll deal with it. After all, this is the woman who conversed with the archangel Gabriel and welcomed the Magi to Bethlehem. She has lots of poise and chutzpah. Just do what he tells you.

It all works out beautifully. But my question still haunts me: Isn't this an odd way to launch a ministry? Well, maybe not. Look a bit more closely.

First, Jesus acts with compassion. Since his mission is to make God better known, I'm not surprised if his first act is compassion on the mistaken, the bumbling, and the errant of this world.

Then, too, marriage is more than a wedding or even more than just this couple. We're in the Bible here, and the marriage relationship in the Bible has always been a major way to picture God's love for his special people. In our first Scripture reading from Isaiah, the prophet promises that God is so in love with Israel that God will poetically marry the people. *"Your builder shall marry you; as a Bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so shall your God rejoice in you."* With that whole theme as background, Jesus' presence at a marriage is very significant indeed. This is not about partying and drinking. This is about God, about God's new plans to make the whole world a wedding through Jesus.

Then, too, John calls this "the first of Jesus' signs". Not just compassion but a sign. Not just marriage but a sign. A sign, of course, points to something beyond itself. What is this pointing to?

Among other things, Jesus' sign is saying: God is doing big things; God is thinking big; God is acting big. And most of us are missing what God is doing. Was it the great theologian Mae West who said, "Honey, life's a banquet, and most poor suckers are starving to death"? She was on to something, that Mae. At Cana, God's power produced 180 gallons of special reserve Manishevitz. But most people didn't even notice. That's the way it was. Mary noticed. The groom certainly noticed. Jesus' disciples noticed. John goes on to say, "They began to believe." There's the point. When we look beyond the sign to what it means, the miracle of faith begins to happen.

Cana says miracles happen all the time. They happen even when we don't notice. They happen, these signs of God's compassion and God's love, whether you and I acknowledge them or not. Cana says the world is full of God's abundance, and too many of us are hungry and thirsty.

St. Augustine said it this way: "He who made the wine that day at the marriage feast does this every year in the vines. But we do not wonder at this because it happens every year; it has lost its marvel by constant occurrence."

Why does Jesus work his first sign at a wedding? It's a sign. It says Jesus reveals the reality of the world as a wedding full of possibility, joy, sharing, and abundance. Jesus takes the ordinary and routine of water and, for those who notice – for those who see the sign – the vision becomes the wine of miracles. Signs like this are everywhere. Right at this Eucharist, Jesus takes bread and wine – signs of the ho-hum and ordinary – and, through the Eucharist, opens worlds of grace and healing for those who have the faith to notice.

Brothers and sisters: Look eagerly. Look everywhere. Look intently, and you'll find signs all around you. Perhaps for you and me, Jesus is saving the best wine until now. Keep looking.