

The Miracle at Cana and the Supernatural Life of Grace

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Grace and nature are not entirely foreign to each other

The miracle at Cana where Jesus changes water into the choicest of wines presents us with a way to understand this relationship between nature and grace. The water Jesus instructed the servers to place into the water jars might be considered a symbol of our human nature. That water is, by the supernatural power of Christ, transformed into the choicest of wines. The wine might be considered our human nature infused with sanctifying grace, and living the life of the Spirit, a "new creation."

CORPUS CHRISTI, TX (Catholic Online) - The miracle of Jesus at the wedding at Cana in the Gospel of John (John 2:1-11) is one sign or (in Greek) *semeion* of a number of signs or *semeia* (plural for *semeion*) contained in the first part of this Gospel. These signs are intended to witness to who Christ was. It is a short enough story to warrant including it in whole:

"On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come.' His mother said to the servers, 'Do whatever he tells you.' Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told them, 'Fill the jars with water.' So they filled them to the brim."

"Then he told them, 'Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter.' So they took it. And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from (although the servers who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him, 'Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now.' Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs (*semeia*) in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him."

Although most of St. John's signs or *semeia* are intended to point to Christ, this sign also seems to suggest something of what happens to a man or woman who becomes incorporated into Christ, becomes one with Christ, who can say, with St. Paul, "to me, to live is Christ." (Phil 1:21). In short, it allows us to understand what happens to the human nature of a Christian when he lives in a state of sanctifying grace, is ushered

into the supernatural life, and is thereby transformed by the Holy Spirit to a new creature in Christ. (2 Cor. 5:17)

Theologians have long disputed about how to best explain the relationship between nature and supernature, between nature and grace. Catholics maintain that, despite man's fall, nature is, to a great degree, good and really worthy of saving. If our human nature were evil, it would not warrant being redeemed and saved.

Yet nature alone, at least following the Fall, is insufficient to enjoy an intimate life with God. Nothing we do naturally can introduce us into the life of God. It takes grace. It takes a supernatural doing by God and a desire on our part to receive, a desire reflected in an act of faith in Jesus.

It takes both human nature and supernatural grace to save a man. And yet these are intricately interconnected. In itself--without any grace whatsoever--human nature has vestiges or traces of God. A human being--whether he enjoys the supernatural life of grace or not--is made in the image of God and is destined, or at least called, for a supernatural life of God, though he, of course, may refuse it. But nothing in human nature itself will earn or gain a right to the supernatural life of God which is, absolutely and without any question, a unmerited gift.

Yet, in a way, both human nature and the supernatural grace are both gifts. That is why human nature, and the natural moral law to which it is witness to, was called the *gratia prima*, the "first grace," by the priest Lucidus when he submitted to the requirements of the Council Synod of Arles in the early 5th century. This is also why theologians such as St. Thomas Aquinas speak of grace as a "second nature." Nature can be called a kind of grace. Grace can be called a kind of nature.

Grace and nature are not entirely foreign to each other. Nature and grace are not equivocal or univocal concepts, but analogical.

Theologians developed certain formulas or maxims to explain the relationship between nature and the supernatural life of grace. They have great truth, and contain in them the germ of any Catholic and so proper understanding of how God relates to the created nature of man. *Gratia praesupponit naturam*. Grace presupposes nature. *Gratia non destruit, sed supponit et perficit naturam*. Grace does not destroy, but supposes and perfects nature. *Gratia elevat naturam*. Grace elevates nature.

The miracle at Cana where Jesus changes water into the choicest of wines presents us with a way to understand this relationship between nature and grace.

The water Jesus instructed the servers to place into the water jars might be considered a symbol of our human nature. That water is, by the supernatural power of Christ, transformed into the choicest of wines. The wine might be considered our human nature, specifically our soul, infused with sanctifying grace, and living the life of the Spirit, a "new creation."

Several things might be gained from this. First, one might note Mary's role in this transformation of the natural life into the supernatural life, in the changing of the water of our human nature into the wine of a human nature supernaturalized or perfected by the grace of God. It is her mediation in the life of grace that has resulted in her being referred to as the mediatrix of all graces. Mary plays the role in heaven that she played on earth in Cana. This is part of the "sign" or *semeion* St. John wants to communicate to his readers.

To be sure, Jesus plays the major part in the transformation of water into wine like He does in the transformation of human nature into the life of grace. It is not Mary who transforms the water into wine, and Mary's role, both at Cana in the supernatural realm, is clearly subordinate to Christ. However, Christ is most responsive to His mother's mediatory role, and it would be an error to minimize the importance of her role for fear of detracting from Christ. Jesus and Mary are not competitors, but cooperators, one may say even partners, in the life of grace and its dispensation to all mankind.

Importantly, the wine does not entail a full destruction of water. Wine is composed of a huge percentage of water along with alcohol and other sugars, acids, enzymes, and other nutrients. Yet wine is not water mixed with this other ingredients, wine is a substance in and of itself really different than water.

When human nature enters into the life of grace, it is not human nature with ingredients added. There is a full transformation of that human nature--without destruction of that human nature--into something new entirely.

Vinum praesupponit aquam. Wine presupposes water. *Vinum non destruit, sed supponit et perficit aquam.* Wine does not destroy, but supposes and perfects water. *Vinum elevat aquam.* Wine elevates water.

Don't the formulas that relate human nature with grace fit neatly into the relationship of water and wine and Christ's miracle at Cana? This appears to be another message of the "sign" or *semeion* that John may be communicating to us.

There seems to be an additional "sign" involved. St. John observes that the water that Jesus changed into the choicest of wines is much better than the wine that had been served to the guests before this new wine. It would appear, that the choice wine is compared to the old wine.

Is this not a sign that the life under grace brought to us by Christ, a life *sub gratia*, is superior to any sort of life under law, *sub lege*? Life under the Mosaic dispensation, the life *sub lege*, is something more than mere human nature (water); it is, after all wine. But life under the Christian dispensation, the life *sub gratia*, is something far better than the life *sub lege*. The difference between the life *sub lege* and the life *sub gratia*, between the inferior wine and the superior wine, is Christ.

Even if it were possible to live our lives in conformity with the natural moral law, something exceedingly difficult given that we suffer from original sin, it would avail us nothing in terms of the supernatural life of grace. While compliance with the natural moral law is *necessary* for salvation, it is not *sufficient*. In abiding by the natural law,

we would live the life of water, a life of water with various levels of impurities, a life of water which even Plato or Socrates did not escape.

The life of grace is *necessary* for salvation, and if the natural moral law is complied with, both *necessary* and *sufficient* for salvation. And this combination of nature and supernature is only wrought by the one who wrought the miracle, the "sign" or *semeion*, in Cana of Galilee.

What Jesus wrought in that small town of Cana of Galilee at the behest of the Blessed Virgin Mary, He does to every soul who asks for something more than the water of a natural life, who also asks for the superior wine of the supernatural life of grace.

Mary! Ask that Jesus change me from water into wine!

Jesus! Listen to your mother, and change me from water into wine!

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