

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

It's easy to miss the connection between the Gospel chosen for this Sunday and the ones for the Feast of the Epiphany and the Baptism of the Lord. But the three Gospels go together because they all say something quite important about God and the kind of relationship he wants to have with us.

Probably we have all heard homilies that used the wedding feast of Cana as a springboard to talk about Christian marriage. But this story is not about marriage and family life so much as it is about the marriage God wants between him and his people.

St. John called this the first of Jesus' "signs," which is a better word to use for it than "miracle" because a sign always points to something. In today's Gospel the sign of changing water into wine points to something that is to come and invites us to look forward to it.

That's the connecting point between this reading and the one about the 3 kings and the one about Jesus' baptism. The story about the 3 kings is really about how God's promise of salvation is meant for everyone, regardless of where they live or where they come from. We're invited to look forward to that happening.

The story about Jesus' baptism is really about God's desire that we all be brought into God's own family. We are invited to think of ourselves as children of God and brothers and sisters of Jesus.

All three stories tell us a great deal about the kind of God we

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have: one who loves us with an overflowing love and wants to include us in the very life the Father, Son and Holy Spirit share with one another.

That's the reason that in the story about the wedding feast of Cana St. John pays almost no attention to the actual bride and groom because the story is primarily about the marriage of God and his people.

Before Jesus moves into action the wedding is without wine, which is similar to those situations in which the old traditions, like the empty jars in the story, have lost their power, or to those situations in which we try to do everything ourselves, without reference to our relationship with God.

This wedding has become a lifeless celebration. The people go through the motions, but there is no passion, no spark. It is as if they think this is what they are supposed to do, but they can't remember why.

Then, Mary the mother of Jesus enters the scene. She speaks for the people in their lack, but also in their to celebrate life. And she will not leave things as they are. A wedding without wine is like life without passion, without joy or investment.

At first, Jesus says that his "hour" has not yet come, but apparently, he reconsiders. It may not be the hour of his victory on the cross, but the gift of life that happens on the cross can be brought to bear here, too, in this wedding celebration.

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But even Jesus cannot do it alone. He asks the servants to do something utterly simple: to fill the water jars with water. And the fact that the servants fill the jars to the brim shows him that they are ready for new life to be breathed into a lifeless tradition. They demonstrate wholeheartedness and that gives God something to work with.

We may not be living in the same time and place as the guests at Cana, but there may still be something in common between them and us. It can happen to us, too, that we end up going through the motions of our faith not expecting much to happen. And nothing does. We fail to give God some wholeheartedness, some single-minded devotion to work with.

This happens when we use our practice of the faith as a sort of insurance policy. As long as we are going to church on Sunday, we'll be fine, right?

It can happen also when we work hard at living a moral life—doing good and avoiding evil, but never really taking the step of submitting ourselves to the demands of an actual relationship with God, where the water of Christian morality becomes the wine of Christian spirituality. The difference between the two can be summarized in one word: joy.

Mary refused to accept a wedding feast without joy. She was convinced that God has an extravagant gift he wants to give us, but her people had become too passive, too bound up to receive it.

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Today she asks us if we want things to be different, if we are willing to believe wholeheartedly in the extravagance of God's love and what he continually says he wants with us.

If so, it's time to turn to Jesus and do whatever he tells us. And it's time to expect great things will come from it.