

The Gospel of John is sometimes called the Book of Signs. Within the first twelve chapters, there are seven signs from heaven. In these miracles, “the Word reveals himself to the world and to his own ...” (Brown, Raymond). Each of the seven signs, helps us to better understand Jesus and his mission.

- At the wedding feast of Cana, Jesus changes water into wine. The stone jars that contain the water are normally used for a purifying ritual. We know at Mass, wine becomes the blood of Christ which Jesus shed for the purification of our sins. We draw the connection between Cana and the Lord’s Supper when Jesus tells us his hour has not yet come. His hour comes during Holy Week when he sheds his blood on the cross for our salvation.
- The second sign also happens while Jesus is in Cana. A royal official wants Jesus to travel to Capernaum to heal his bedridden son near death. Jesus tells him that his son will live and heals from Cana rather than accompanying the man back to his home. As we ponder our own mortality, is this not what happens when we are bedridden and near death? A greater sign than a healing miracle is the invitation by Jesus to rise from death to eternal life. The hour of Jesus when he dies makes possible our own hour in which we die and our judged by God. The royal officials request of Jesus calls to mind our own responsibility to pray for others especially as they are near death.
- In the third sign, Jesus heals a paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem on the Sabbath. He has suffered for 38 years. He is overlooked by everyone and never has the chance to enter the pool on his own. In healing the paralytic, Jesus is also teaching us that we too must look out for those who are overlooked. No one should be left behind. The Sabbath is an especially appropriate day to reach out to others in need with corporal or spiritual works of mercy.
- In the fourth sign, Jesus feeds 5,000 after obtaining five barley loaves and two fish from a young boy. The feeding anticipates the Eucharist and the final banquet in the kingdom. It also looks backward, to the feeding of Israel with manna in the desert at the time of the Exodus (Note Mt 14:13-21). Additionally, Jesus invites us to help in the corporal work of mercy of feeding the hungry. We may not have much more than five loaves and two fish, but as we and others offer help, there is much we can accomplish in following the example of Jesus.
- In the fifth sign, Jesus walks on water. Looking backward to the Exodus, God helped Moses part the Red Sea so the Israelites could escape slavery and enter into the desert on their long journey to the Promised Land. Looking forward, Jesus is the first born of the dead passing through death to rise again. Jesus is there to help us pass through death on our own journey to the Promised Land of Eternity.
- In the sixth sign, Jesus is again in Jerusalem on the Sabbath. This time he heals the man born blind. We often think of a lack of sight as a disability, but the man has clear vision when it comes to faith. He is able to see in Jesus what no one else can see. Jesus also highlights the blindness helps to further the Kingdom of God. It “is so that the works of God might be made visible through him” (Jn 9:3). This is good to keep in mind when we feel weighed down by our own crosses. Jesus may be using us to make his works visible.
- The seventh sign is the raising of Lazarus after he has been dead for three days. As with the sixth sign, “it is for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (Jn 11:4). All of the baptized are called to be coworkers in the vineyard. As we die to ourselves following the example of the death of Jesus on the cross, we can glorify God through our own selflessness.

The seven signs help us to better understand Jesus and his mission from 2,000 years ago. As we reflect on each biblical sign, we should look for a parallel sign in our own lives. God is ever present in our lives performing signs to help us. In turn, he calls us to be signs to help others in their faith journey.