Dear Friends,

Cana and our readiness for a miracle.

This weekend’s readings bring to our reflection the favorite metaphor of marriage in the Hebrew Bible imaging God’s relationship with the people of God. Yahweh is to Israel as husband is to wife. Think of Hosea’s comparison of his troubled marriage with the story of God’s relationship with Israel. The oracles of Isaiah use this tradition about Israel’s future (even messianic) restoration, as for example in this Sunday’s first reading, where the coming vindication of Jerusalem is portrayed as a wedding feast for God and his spouse.

Jesus himself used this metaphor several times. When the Pharisees ask why Jesus’ disciples are not into extra fasting like those of the Baptist (Mk 2:18), he replies, “Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?” He continues the metaphor by speaking of his presence and ministry as “new wine” demanding new wineskins. The night before he died, he told his disciples that ‘he is going to prepare a place for them to take them’. This parting message is usually spoken by the groom after the week of wedding celebrations before he takes his bride to their new home.

This background helps us appreciate the account of the wedding feast of Cana. Far more is going on here than an affirmation that Jesus had a good party or was affirming the institution of marriage. Both are surely true. But in the Fourth Evangelist’s framework, the wedding feast at Cana is nothing less than the revelation of divinity in Jesus as Word made flesh. Cana, in a sense, acts this out. Take the jars of water that become wine. One hundred twenty to one hundred eighty gallons of wine is a great deal. And John is careful to note that the containers are stone jars, that is, vases not made the usual ceramic way, out of clay worked and baked, but sculpted out blocks of stone. Such jars were costly, the very best, and always pure because they were nonporous. John notes that there are six and that they are there for the purpose of Jewish ritual washing. The symbolism is clear. As stone and large, they are special and abundant; but as only six (not seven – symbol of perfection), they are incomplete. When people do what Jesus says, water becomes a surprising abundance of the best wine of all. The bridegroom has arrived with new wine. The wedding party of the new covenant has begun.

When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” And 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.” — Jn 2:3-5

First of all, this wedding scene teaches us that our human lives are made up of different times, different moments: there’s a time for celebration, for falling in love, but there’s also a time when the wine runs out and the celebration is in danger of ending earlier than expected. There are times in which God reveals himself in our lives and times in which He chooses to remain silent. There are times in life when we are rich and we can invite others to participate in our joy and there are times when we are poor, like this couple, who did not have enough wine to share. But I like to think that the wine ran out because there were more guests than expected: it makes me think of a couple that knows how to welcome all without counting, a couple with a love so deep they make everyone around them always feel at home. It would be beautiful if every home ran out of wine due to their great hospitality. Only when we share all the wine we have, only if we let it all be consumed, only then will Christ come to repeat His miracle, giving us not just any wine, but the best. Jesus does not only change water into wine but he also transforms the jars. They are no longer instruments for the carrying out of the law but become the source of joy.

The overabundance of this miracle recalls the prophecy of Amos, who says to a falling House of Israel: “the days are coming (when)… the mountains shall drip with the juice of the grapes, and all the hills shall run with it. I will restore my people, Israel…” (Am 9:13-14). This prophecy comes after God promises through Amos that although He will scatter Israel into exile for their sins, He will call them back and reestablish them under a King from the house of David. The invitation to us is to allow Christ to enter into our human situation and transform it.

Be blessed. Fr. Tom Kunnel C.O.
The list of these gifts can be found in Isaiah 11:2-3. Traditionally, the Church has identified seven gifts of the Holy Spirit in this list. Four of them are gifts for the mind: wisdom, understanding, counsel, and knowledge. And three of them are gifts for the heart or will: piety, fortitude, and fear of the Lord.

These ordinary gifts are like the roots of a great tree in the soul of a person. They nourish the soul, and they result in a person’s flourishing, in his bearing fruit for the Lord.

Because the gifts are in each of God’s people always, so are the fruits of the Holy Spirit that arise from gifts. Traditionally, the Church has taken there to be twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit, a list developed from a slightly shorter list in Galatians 5:22-23.

The list of the fruits of the Holy Spirit begins with these five: love, joy, peace, patience, and long-suffering.

A person who has the Holy Spirit dwelling in him has intimately united with him his beloved Lord. And that is why love is the first fruit of the Holy Spirit. Joy follows, because of the presence of the beloved. And peace comes next. If you are your beloved’s and he is yours (Song of Songs 2:16), then you can be at peace. You already have all that is most precious to you. And that is why you can have patience and long-suffering too. The hard things of the world are easier to endure if your love loves you and is with you.
The first reading: Is 62:1-5

The image of Zion (Jerusalem) as the bride of Yahweh is not new. It appears repeatedly in earlier prophetic literature. Hosea structures a major part of his prophecy around this theme. His tragedy of Israel’s infidelity in going after other “husbands” (the baals worshiped in fertility cults) may well be a reaction drawn from the unfortunate circumstances of his own marriage (Hos 1 - 3). Ezekiel treats infidelity at length, using the same image of the faithless wife (Ez 16).

Here the scenario is totally positive. Re-establishment emerges slowly like the first streak of morning light on the horizon or the light from burning torches that illumined the darkest corners of Jerusalem on festive occasions (v1). The Gentiles witness the emerging wonder although their reaction is muted. Jerusalem is to be renamed (v2). The significance of a name in antiquity is linked to its close identification with the person and his/her fixed destiny (e.g. Gen 17:5). The names given Zion (here representing Israel as a whole) express Yahweh’s deep affection and commitment (my delight, espoused); abandoned are the names identified with her former rejection and punishment (v4). She is taken by Yahweh as bride. So complete is forgiveness that Zion is spoken of as one still in a virginal state, untouched and untainted. The picture is one of hope-filled expectations and unlimited prospects for the future, as husband and wife are solemnly united (v5)

Jesus’ provision of abundant wine for the wedding feast in Cana (120 to 180 gallons of it), signifies that the day foreseen by Isaiah has arrived. By our Baptism, each of us has been betrothed to Christ as a bride to her Bridegroom (see II Cor. 11:2).

The second reading: I Cor 12:4-11

Paul reminds the members of the Corinthian community that each of them is endowed by the Holy Spirit with distinctive gifts. The Holy Spirit is the very Life of God, the outpouring of the Spirit and His charisms upon us who believe in Jesus is a participation in the Life of God. In addition, each gift has been given for the sake and well-being of others in the family of believers, and in order to bear witness to God’s power and glory. There are many gifts but only one Giver; there are different gifts but only one goal, i.e., the common good of the whole believing community. Paul reminds us that “to each person is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:6), not for personal profit. Hence, we must use our gifts to build up, protect and nourish the ties that bind us in Christ, because we are united to God as in a marital relationship. Espoused to God, we are bound also to one another, much as “in-laws” are interlinked through loving familial bonds. In the context of today’s Gospel report of the wedding at Cana Paul is telling spouses to accept each other, just as they are, as God’s gifts, to each other.

GOSPEL INSIGHTS Jn 2:1 - 12

The setting for the miracle: Christ’s first miracle, which John refers to as a “sign,” takes place in the village of Cana in Galilee, the hometown of the disciple Nathaniel but an otherwise insignificant town, located some eight miles northeast of Nazareth. This miracle is the first in John’s series of seven signs by which Jesus manifested Divine power and glory during public ministry. Presumably, the “disciples” who accompanied Jesus were Andrew, Simon Peter, Zebedee’s sons James and John, Philip, and Nathaniel. Jesus’ mother Mary was also present. Joseph is not mentioned in the story; he may well have died already. It is also possible that Mary was in some way related to the bride or groom and may have been serving as an assistant to the wedding director. According to a version recounted in the Coptic Gospels, the bridegroom was Simon of Cana, Jesus’ disciple and the brother of Jacob and Judah. He was the son of Joseph’s brother Cleophas (Helpai) and Mary’s elder sister, and, hence, the nephew of both Mary and Joseph. Such weddings usually began on Wednesdays with the celebration lasting for seven days. During this period, guests arrived each day bringing gifts and participating in the joy of the occasion. In verse 3, we read that, in the course of the celebration, “the wine ran short.” This was a difficult situation for the young couple, and may indicate that they came from poor families. Among the Jews of that time, wine was not only considered a staple food item, but was also frequently used in times of celebration. To run short of wine at a wedding feast was certainly a serious problem, particularly damaging to the reputation of the host and an ill omen for the newly-married couple. Although Jesus addressed his mother as “Woman” or “Dear Woman,” the term was roughly equivalent to our word “lady” or “madam”, and was not, in itself, unnecessarily harsh. It was, in fact, a term of respect and is the same word Jesus used in addressing Mary from the cross, saying of John, “Woman, behold your Son.” Besides, by calling her “woman,” Our Lord is linking the Blessed Virgin Mary to Eve.
Final Wedding Feast
The liturgy today stresses the finality of all things in Christ and addresses specifically the importance of the final era in which we live. However, the recurring image of marriage allows us to reflect on this calling in life and on its relationship to God’s love for his people and the manifestation of that love in Jesus. Church teaching on the unity, indissolubility, and fruitful commitment in marriage has important roots in this scriptural background.

Christianity was never intended to be a grim and dour affair. Joy is essential to Israel’s picture of the final outcome. The image used today is that of a wedding. We don’t really consider a wedding as “gloom and doom.” The end time is to be marked by a clear sign of God’s total fidelity as well as the loving response of a converted people. It is often said that many young people are reluctant to commit themselves to a life in the church because they see so few genuinely happy people, or, if they are happy, they have a hard time expressing it. Experience tells us that is an observation not to be casually dismissed. Our actions speak louder than anything. If we are totally involved in a great adventure, the boundless mystery of God’s love, then it should show itself.

He Has Kept the Best Wine to Last:
In today’s reading Isaiah looks for signs of God’s full restoration of Israel as God’s people. In the Old Testament wine was often used as a sign or symbol of the gifts of God. The Book of Proverbs speaks of Lady Wisdom providing good wine for those who follow her, and the prophets often speak of good wine as a characteristic of the Messianic kingdom promised by God. John’s Gospel reflects that image by using the gift of the best wine as the first miracle of Jesus’ public life. Just as Jesus gave wine as a gift to the newlyweds, so Jesus gives us gifts. St Paul tells us that God gives each of us different gifts so that we, too, can be signs of God’s goodness and love when we use our gifts according to His will and for the good of others. The Church sees in the Cana miracle the confirmation of the goodness of marriage between a man and a woman and sees marriage between a man and a woman as an effective sign of Christ’s presence (CCC #1613).

QUIZ TIME
1. What does the first reading say that God will do to His people?
   A) Destroy them  B) Make them rich  C) Forget them  D) Marry them

2. How many Spirits are mentioned by Paul in his letter?
   A) Countless  B) One  C) Three  D) None

3. Who told Jesus that there was no more wine?
   A) Peter  B) Bridegroom  C) Mary  D) Head waiter

4. What title did Jesus call Mary at Cana?
   A) Queen  B) Mary  C) Woman  D) Mother

5. What did Jesus turn into wine at the wedding?
   A) Grape juice  B) Water  C) Cider  D) *Soda

QUIZ ANSWERS
1D, 2D, 3C, 4C, 5B

QUESTIONS?
1. Does the intimate marital imagery help you understand God’s relationship with you?
2. What spiritual gifts has the Spirit blessed you with? What gift do you appreciate in the people close to you?
3. What lessons does Mary teach us at Cana?