

Friday (Cardinal Basil Hume)

The mercy of the Father is strong. That mercy is both tenderness and fidelity to those he has created for union with him. Tenderness and steadfastness are a powerful combination, and they are the reason for God wanting to be involved closely with us. Because he so loved us, he became, in his son Jesus Christ, a pilgrim like us.

Scripture (1Cor. 1:4-9)

I am continually thanking God about you, for the grace of God which you have been given in Christ Jesus; in him you have been richly endowed in every kind of utterance and knowledge. And so that you are not lacking in any gift as you wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed, he will continue to give you strength to the very end, so that you will be irreproachable on the Day of Our Lord Jesus Christ. You can rely on God who has called you to be partners with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

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"In every activity of evangelization, the primacy always belongs to God, who has called us to cooperate with him and who leads us on by the power of his Spirit. The real newness is the newness which God himself mysteriously brings about and inspires, provokes, guides and accompanies in a thousand ways. **This conviction enables us to maintain a spirit of joy in the midst of a task so demanding and challenging that it engages our entire life. God asks everything of us, yet at the same time he offers everything to us.**"

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*

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2nd Week of Ordinary Time

Our excited God

As the Sundays move into Ordinary Time, it might be expected that things will settle into a more routine, ordinary telling of Jesus' life, but he has other ideas as he bursts into public life at Cana, (John 2:1-2). If this was an 'outsider's' first, and only, introduction to Jesus, they might go away thinking he was a magician with a fondness for a good time, (making 180 gallons of it suggests he has no problem with people having a good party.).

Jesus' miracles, though, are not 'magic'. In his Gospel, John uses 'sign' instead of miracle, so I need to discover what this is pointing to, what it is a sign of. The actual point when the water is changed into wine is not actually mentioned, so this clearly isn't the important point of the incident.

The first clue is in the setting: a wedding is a familiar Old Testament motif for God's relationship with his people, with him being the groom and his people being the bride. Isaiah 62:1-5 is a good example. As I read this passage and its promises of the bright future which God plans for his people, I can't help but notice his sense of joy: the groom is impatient to marry! I mustn't underestimate or 'tidy up' the depth and passion of this relationship: God being excited about being with his people, and using the imagery of marrying shows how much he loves them and how intimately he wants to share the lives of his people; he is not an abstract or remote God. Neither is he an idealist carried away by 'love'; his bride is no shrinking violet who has never been kissed, and he knows it! She has well and truly earned the names 'forsaken' and 'abandoned', because of her past, which could include terms such as 'colourful' and 'wanton'. The groom knows all about this – he is the one who she has cheated on, but he 'will not grow weary'. He does not forget her past or sweep it under the carpet: he will transform her by his love. Transformation is the key to understanding the wedding at Cana. The water jars are those used for ritual washing, so represent the Old Covenant. Jesus transforms this water into wine - a common image for the abundance and joy of the Messianic feast which symbolises the new covenant through which the Messiah transforms the world. The old wine has run out, the Old Covenant has run its course and now is the time for the New Covenant.

It's Mary who prompts Jesus to act, and the only other time she appears in John's Gospel is at the foot of the cross. She is the one who ushers in Jesus and who is present at the cross, 'the hour' that Jesus refers to, ('my hour has not yet come'), when the New Covenant is fully established. Addressing her as 'woman' seems surprisingly abrupt, (not something I would ever try with my mother!) but it is also the word used for 'Eve', which again points to the healing of the relationship between us: – Mary is the new Eve. Through this sign, Jesus 'let his glory be revealed' and the disciples could therefore believe he was the Messiah, the one who was making real the marriage of God to his people. As with any marriage, a new way of life begins. Jesus transformed the external, 'keep the rules' religion into the joyful and intimate relationship with God, the relationship that he longs to share with all. Our role as disciples, then, is to live in the new relationship, to build a church which is based on a marriage, rather than a rule book, an excited and passionate God, not a judge. The disciples' role was not to learn to change water into wine, but to distribute it. Martin Bennett

Monday (A Carthusian monk)

We can never be urged too strongly to meditate upon the definition that God has given of himself...*God is Love*. The number of those who know how to give themselves, (and want to do so) is not legion. And amongst those who seem to give themselves, many are seeking something in others to complete themselves. It is in this respect that God is so infinitely superior to us, for he is Love - the gift of self. He is overflowing Plenitude, yearning to pour himself out into our nothingness, in order that he may fill it with his infinite being. The more helpless and imperfect we are, the greater is the capacity he finds in us to receive him. Love, then, for us consists above all in accepting this outpouring of life; for him, love consists in bestowing it.

Scripture (Isaiah 62:1-2,4-5)

About Zion I will not be silent, about Jerusalem I shall not grow weary until her integrity shines out like the dawn and her salvation flames like a torch. The nations shall then see your integrity, all the kings your glory, and you will be called by a new name, one which the mouth of the Lord will confer. No more will you be known as 'Forsaken' nor your land 'Desolation'; but you shall be called 'My Delight' and your land 'The Wedded'; for Yahweh will take delight in you and your land will have its wedding. Like a young man marrying a virgin, so will the one who rebuilt you wed you, and as the bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so will your God rejoice in you.

Tuesday (1st Epistle of St. Clement)

Who can describe the chain of God's love? Who has the capacity to tell the greatness of its beauty? The height to which love exalts us is inexpressible. Love binds us to God, love hides a multitude of sins; love bears everything, love endures everything. In love the Master received us; through the love he had for us, our Lord Jesus Christ by the will of God gave his blood for us, his flesh for our flesh, his life for our life.

Scripture (John 17:20-23)

I pray not only for these but also for those who through their teaching will come to believe in me. May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us. I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one. With me in them and you in me, may they be so perfected in unity that the world will recognise that it was you who sent me and that you have loved them as you loved me.

Wednesday (Thomas a Kempis)

Learn to turn from worldly things, and give yourself to spiritual things, and you will see the kingdom of God come within you. Christ will come to you, and impart his consolations to you, if you prepare a worthy dwelling for him in your heart. All true glory is within, and there he delights to dwell. He often visits the spiritual person, and holds sweet discourse with them, granting refreshing grace, great peace and friendship exceeding all expectation. Come then, faithful soul; prepare your heart for your Divine Spouse that he may deign to come to you and dwell within you.

Scripture (Ezekiel 36:24-29)

I shall take you from among the nations and gather you back from all the countries, and bring you home to your own country. I shall pour clean water over you and you shall be cleansed. I shall give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I shall remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh instead. I shall put my spirit in you, and make you keep my laws. You will be my people and I shall be your God. I shall save you from everything that defiles you.

Thursday (Julian of Norwich)

Although, because of our anger and wilfulness, we are now in trouble, anger and distress, as happens to those who stumble and are blind, we are still kept safe and sound in God's merciful keeping so that we are not lost. Because of the storms and sorrows that beset us here we often seem to be dead in spirit—as others judge. But in the sight of God, no soul is ever dead, nor ever shall be. I saw that God is our true peace. He watches over us when we can find no rest, and he works continually to bring us to peace that shall never end. We are his crown, and this crown is the joy of the Father, the glory of the Son, and the happiness of the Holy Spirit, and the endless wondering and delight of all who are in heaven.

Scripture (1John 2: 24-25, 3:1-2)

Let what you heard in the beginning remain in you; as long as what you heard in the beginning remains in you, you will remain in the Son and in the Father. And the promise he made you himself is eternal life. You must see what great love the Father has lavished on us by letting us be called God's children - which is what we are. My dear friends, we are already God's children, but what we shall be in the future has not yet been revealed. We are well aware that when he appears we shall be like him.