

Homily for January 16, 2022

“Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs at Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him.”

“Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs...”

The gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke record dozens of miracles Our Lord performed to show His power, and to demonstrate that in Him, the Reign of God is present; the reign of God is at hand.

The Gospel accord to Saint John centers on seven miracles, which he calls “Signs.” In John, these Signs are particularly emphasized as invitations to discipleship. And the passages describe the various responses of different people to this invitation to walk with Christ.

Three of these signs occur also in the other gospels: the curing of the royal official’s son; the multiplication of the loaves; and the walking on the sea. Three more of these signs are of the same type of miracles in the other gospels: the curing of a paralytic; the curing of a blind man, and the raising of the dead.

The changing of water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana is only reported in John. And John makes it a point to say this is the First Sign.

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Weddings take place every day. But a wedding is extremely important and special to the bride, the groom, the families, and their community. For most people, a wedding is a defining moment. Their lives are changed from that day forward. A wedding is – to apply Andy Warhol’s famous line – the fifteen minutes of fame most of us get. It is the beginning of a journey filled with risks and dangers and joys and triumphs. A wedding celebration in the first century in Israel lasted days, and the supply of wine was an integral part of the festivities. To run out was a disastrous event.

Turning water into wine is a Sign pointing to Jesus as the long-awaited bridegroom of God’s people. Our passage from Isaiah today voices that expectation:

“As a young man marries a virgin, your Builder shall marry you; and as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so shall your God rejoice in you.”

Turning water into wine is also a Sign indicating that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. In another passage from Isaiah, we remember those enticing words:

“On this mountain the LORD of hosts will provide for all peoples A feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines.”

The time Has come. Messiah and God has arrived. And so people have a choice to make about Jesus. Will they believe? Will they be His disciples?

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The turning of Water into wine is a Sign of Jesus’ saving mission. It points to the saving event of His Passion, Death, and Resurrection; the event out of which all graces abundantly flow.

In regard to Christ’s Suffering and Death - Our Lord’s response to His mother indicates that inaugurating this Sign is related to “His Hour.” In John’s gospel, “The Hour” refers to His Passion and Death for us. This act is tied to the Cross.

This understanding is reinforced if we read just two verse further in John. We are told there that the Jewish Passover was near. The Passover is mentioned three times in John’s gospel: here still at the beginning of the book; then at the time of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fish; and finally as we enter into the events of Holy Week. This first Sign begins Jesus’ ministry – His journey to Calvary.

There is also a parallel taking place here. The Blessed Mother and Christ’s disciples are present for this first Sign. She and the Beloved Disciple are both present at the foot of the Cross.

And Married couples recognize this as well. In Holy Matrimony a couple shares in the redeeming self-sacrifice that lifts up their spouse, any children they have, and all who are touched by the couple.

In regard to the Resurrection – we are given a hint of it at the beginning. The compilers of the Lectionary decided not to include these words, but the verse begins by saying, “On the third day there was a wedding...” On the third day. These words would have been as well known to those who first heard this gospel

as they are to us. Jesus rose “on the Third Day.” The words jump out to us like a sign pointing to the end of the gospel. On that Third day since his burial, on the First Day of the Week, Jesus who appeared to the disciples gathered. And they would believe. As His disciples at the wedding began to believe.

From the first centuries Christians have understood that the saving graces flowing from the death and Resurrection of Christ are what empowers Baptism, the Eucharist, Marriage, and all the sacraments.

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I mentioned at the beginning that John emphasizes Christ’ Signs as invitations to believe and to be disciples.

In that sense all people, believers and non-believers alike, are invited to notice Christ in their midst – helping them and calling them to a closer walk. All people are invited to heed the words of Mary. She gave advice to the servers. It is good advice to us every day. Do what he tells you to do.

All misery and sin in the world comes from humanity as a whole, and people as individuals, straying from that advice. Do what He tells you to do.

On this weekend when we remember the results of the life of a contemporary believer in Christ, the Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Junior. May we also risk being bold enough to proclaim Christ’s love in a world that still needs to hear that love is light in the darkness. May we risk doing what Jesus tells us to do. Christ is the one who still brings graces overflowing into a world that sorely needs His redemption.