

"THERE WAS A WEDDING AT CANA IN GALILEE..." In this way John begins his remarkable story of the changing by Jesus of water to wine. The story seems so simple: Jesus and his disciples have apparently accepted an invitation to a local wedding celebration, perhaps a neighbor, a close family friend, or even a relative. His mother is also present, apparently helping the host family with the details of hospitality, with the food and beverage. An embarrassing shortage occurs, but through Mary's mediation Jesus wonderfully comes to the rescue.

John's account of the changing of water into wine works as a simple human interest story only if we don't ask any probing questions of the account. And yet the moment we start to wonder what it all means, that is the moment we open ourselves to the author's purpose in writing. For example, just what is that dialogue between Jesus and his Mother all about? "WOMAN," says Jesus. "HOW DOES THIS CONCERN OF YOURS INVOLVE ME?" That doesn't sound like the kind of response a good Jewish boy ought to make to his mother. The meaning has puzzled translators and interpreters. The very same idiom is found in Mark's Gospel. The demon Jesus is about to exorcize speaks it to him. It is usually translated this way: "WHAT DO YOU WANT OF US, JESUS OF NAZARETH." If it is not a rebuke in John's Gospel, at the very least, it doesn't sound as if Jesus is concerned about the problem. And yet his mother acts as if it were a positive response to her concern and, in her directions to the servants, apparently expects some action.

John tells us near the end of his Gospel why he is writing: "THERE ARE MANY OTHER SIGNS THAT JESUS WORKED AND THE DISCIPLES SAW, BUT THEY ARE NOT RECORDED IN THIS BOOK. THESE ARE RECORDED SO THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD, AND THAT BELIEVING YOU MAY HAVE LIFE THROUGH HIS NAME." The miracles that he has included in his Gospel are supposed to assist the reader to faith in Jesus, faith that in him God was acting for our salvation. That is the also the purpose of this first miracle of John's Gospel. At the end of the account, the evangelist writes explicitl: "JESUS PERFORMED THIS FIRST (or "beginning") OF HIS SIGNS AT CANA IN GALILEE. THUS DID HE REVEAL HIS GLORY, AND HIS DISCIPLES BEGAN TO BELIEVE IN HIM."

John does not use the word "miracle" for the changing of water into wine, nor for that matter does he use the word in his Gospel for any of the spectacular deeds of Jesus. So here at the Wedding Feast of Cana the miracle of transformation is a sign. This is a story about faith. The miracle is meant to lead the viewer (and the hearer and the reader) to something beyond itself. It is meant as a vehicle for the revelation of the identity of the person who performed that deed.

In the account of the Wedding at Cana, the "sign" reveals Jesus' glory and seals the call of his disciples. It also invites us to meditate with eyes of faith on the mystery of Christ's transforming presence in our world. John has applied all his skill as a preacher and all his knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures to put that message across.

A wedding feast is a common biblical image of the age when the kingdom of God would be completely revealed and made present in the sight of all. One of the images of joy in the age of the Messiah is an abundance of wine. John tells us that the jars held about 120 gallons, enough wine to make a lot of people rather happy. The water jars were six in number, John tells us, one less than the number of perfection or completeness in biblical thought. The water of purification is transformed into choice wine. The imperfect and incomplete is in Jesus made perfect and complete. John has placed this incident on the "third" day of the opening week of the public ministry of Jesus. It is meant to allude to the greatest of signs of this Gospel: the passion, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus, the "hour of glory" in the fourth Gospel. The mother of Jesus appears in only two places in John's Gospel: here at Cana in Galilee at the first of the signs and at the foot of the cross, the last and greatest of his signs. The quest for human joy and happiness is met by the overwhelming gift of divine joy and transformed. The desire for ordinary life is transformed by the ecstatic possibility of the risen life.

Do you think miracles still occur? I don't mean spectacular interventions of the divine in our world, overturning momentarily the laws of nature. I means signs that point to presence of the divine in our midst. Vocations offices around the United States have become creative in their advertising. The Archdiocese of Chicago advertizes on buses and subway stops. One advertisement reads this way: "If you're looking for a sign from God, this is it. Consider the priesthood." Holy Trinity Trappist monastery in

Utah hosts three-day retreats for men to introduce them to the monastic life and to invite them to consider a vocation to the contemplative life. Isn't a sign that anyone comes. Isn't it a sign that one young man of 24, studying civil engineering says that he was "allowing himself to seek the silence." Or the 46 year old military man who said, "What I really want to do is serve in a way God wants me to." Or the 20-year old college student who said "I know I need a life of prayer." Or our desire to respond to the suffering people of Haiti. Why should we want to do that? Isn't that a sign of the divine within us moving us to compassion? We will take up a second collection today. Cash is the greatest need at the moment and it has to go to large organizations capable of acting now. The Archdiocese will forward our contributions to Catholic Relief Services. The need will be there for some time. We anticipate having to make this appeal again. If you are not prepared today, you will have other opportunities. Mark your check clearly for Haitian relief.

In the Fourth Gospel, the disciples are not called because they have faith; they are first called, they begin to follow, and they are led to faith gradually and slowly through the days of their discipleship. They are led to faith by listening to the Lord, by seeing signs, by allowing themselves to be transformed by his presence and his grace: the same way we are led to faith. What signs do you see that reveal the glory of God. What signs do you see that lead us to that encounter with the divine, that lead us to faith and then to life? I am grateful for the insights of Ann M. Svennungsen in the preparation of this sermon. (See *New Proclamation: Year C, 2006-2007*

*2007 Advent Through Holy Week*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006, pp. 90-98)