

Epiphany 3 Gospel

I take as my text today from the second chapter of St. John's Gospel:

Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.

What an interesting way to begin a ministry — seemingly rebuffing your mother then turning water into wine, not just a little bit of water into a little wine but a lot of water and a lot of wine, perhaps as much as 180 gallons.

Now, if we were to examine this passage — the story of the miracle of water into wine — from what we perceive as the perspective of John's intent in his Gospel, that is to expose the deeper meaning to be found throughout his account of the Ministry of our Lord, we may well note something we could term *the complexity of the simple*.

Each simple act of our Lord reveals something of his human character, as well as his Divine Nature.

With that thought in mind, let's look at the *Miracle of Turning Water into Wine*, and see if we can uncover the complexity that underlies the simple.

The story begins with Jesus and his disciples attending a wedding feast which, in that time, was quite an event. The *Coptic Gospels* indicate that there was a familial connection to the groom, and that Mary might well have been involved in the preparations for the feast.

There must have been a large number present, including Jesus and his disciples, that is those who he had chosen by this point, the beginning of his Ministry.

As the wedding feast progressed, Mary noted that they were running out of wine and turned to Jesus for help. She, perhaps having made the preparations for the feast, running out of wine would have been an embarrassment.

It would be natural for Mary to turn to Jesus for help. He had been the one to care for her and the family, as it is presumed that Joseph had passed away early in Jesus' life.

For that era, the situation would be dire, for unexpectedly, probably from the overwhelming attendance, the wine had run out. There is a saying of the Rabbis: ***Without wine, there is no joy.***

More than the joy which wine brought, it was also an essential because, in the East, the wine was mixed with water for drinking — two parts wine to three parts water.

Mary takes note of the situation, and simply says to Jesus: *They have no wine.*

And Jesus replies: *Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come.*

When we think of our Lord, and hear that statement, we might very well think that Jesus disrespected his mother if not women in general. But we must look at this utterance in the context of the times.

This was a common phrase then that conveyed different meaning, depending on the tone in which it was said.

If it were said angrily, then it would convey disagreement and reproach; but, if spoken in a kindly tone, it would convey misunderstanding.

In the context of the moment and of the character and nature of Jesus, the phrase would come across as:

Mother, don't worry. You don't understand the moment. I will take care of this in my own way.

Looking around, Jesus saw the large water jars at the door, jars large enough to hold about 20 or 30 gallons each. There were six of them to be used in the purifying ceremonies, that is the cleansing of hands and feet.

Why feet? Well, almost everyone wore a type of sandal that was made of a piece of leather for the bottom of the foot and was attached by several leather straps to hold it in place. Thus exposed, the foot would either be very dusty, when it was dry weather, or muddy when it was rainy, and would need to be cleaned before attending the feast. Of course, the same would apply to the hands, as by Jewish custom there was a ritual cleansing of the hands before eating.

Jesus' mother told the servants to do whatever he said.

Jesus then told the servants to fill the jars with water to the brim, which they did. Next, he said to them to draw out some, and take it to the governor or, perhaps more correctly the master of ceremonies.

Having tasted the wine, the master of ceremonies tells the bridegroom that, unlike most people, he has saved the best wine for last.

So, we have a simple account of the first miracle that Jesus performed in Galilee.

But, if we delve deeper, we find that John is telling us more, using, as Jesus did, the simple and natural surroundings to convey a more complex and spiritual meaning.

When Jesus said to his mother: *Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come*; he was gently telling her that it was in his hands to make it right, in this hour, though his hour, the hour for which he had come into the world, was not yet at hand.

Mary fully trusted in her son to do what was necessary so that the bridegroom would not suffer shame and embarrassment — putting her trust fully in Jesus, just as we should do, just as his Disciples had done, and just as John had done throughout his long life in service to our Lord.

Jesus, seeing the six water jars, knows exactly what he will do, and instructs the servants accordingly.

And John, noting that the number of jars is six, sees a deeper meaning.

You see, seven, according to the Jews of the time, was the complete and perfect number, absolute; but the number of jars there was only six, an imperfect number, incomplete, unfinished.

In this, John is saying that the six jars represented the imperfections of the Law, and Jesus took this imperfection, the incompleteness of the Law, and completed it in the Gospel, made it perfect by his **Sacrifice on the Cross**.

In this action, John saw, in the turning of water into wine, the imperfection made into a new wine, the wine of the Gospel, the Grace of God flowing from this Gospel more abundantly than we could ever imagine.

Difficult to imagine 180 gallons of wine; moreover, could a wedding feast consume that much? Perhaps not. But it was enough, and more than enough, just as is God's Grace.

We can delve more into John's Gospel passage for deeper meanings but, for the moment, we should perhaps reflect just on the simpleness of what Jesus did in that beginning of miracles in Galilee.

From him, flows the never ending, living water that brings eternal life. This living water makes perfect the imperfections, not just the Law, but our own individual imperfections, through a new wine, the **Grace of God**.

But, as always, there is more to it. We must accept and drink of this new wine. We must put our trust in Jesus Christ, offering our souls and bodies to him, and, in return, he feeds us at his **Holy Table**, offering us the **Cup of Salvation** from which to drink this new wine, now transformed into his saving **Blood** by his **Sacrifice on the Cross**, to which we join ourselves in the **Eucharistic Sacrifice**, a **Living Sacrifice**.

It all seems so complex yet, at the same time, so simple. Our lives, simply through the miracle of *Faith in Jesus Christ* and accepting God's **Grace** freely given, can be changed, transformed into something extraordinary, complex, and beautiful — we can become **Living Sacrifices** through his **Sacrifice on the Cross**. Even more, through the *Water of Regeneration*, that is **Baptism**, we can be reborn becoming a *Child of God* and joint-heir with Christ to the *Kingdom of Heaven* and *eternal life*.