

January 17, 2016

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come."

The occasion that surrounds today's Gospel is a wedding. It is an Eastern wedding, Eastern in this context being defined as Jewish and other societies' weddings in the middle and far Eastern cultures.

Eastern weddings are very different from Western affairs. In Western weddings the bride is of course the prominent figure. As we have all experienced when the bride enters, clad in all her glory, the whole congregation stands and the organ thunders, "Here comes the bride; fair, fat and wide!" or whatever the proper words are, and every eye is focused on her.

In Eastern weddings, however, it is the groom that is the most prominent. He is the featured one; the bride merely shows up for the wedding. (She is like the bridegroom in a Western wedding -- a sort of necessary add on that usually just costs the father of the bride more money)

In the Eastern wedding, not only is the groom the featured person, but he (or his parents) also pays for the whole affair!

I am told to this day, Eastern weddings can last for two or three days -- some for as long as a week -- with all the relatives of both sides of the family joining together for the big celebration. This is the kind of wedding John is talking about here....

As Mary figures rather prominently, it is thought that this might well have been the wedding of one of Jesus' younger brothers or sisters. But scholars suggest there is a little complication, in that while Jesus

and his disciples were invited guests, considerably more disciples show up than the number the host expected.

In rural settings such as in today's story, people do not make a great deal or fuss over such things as a few extra people at a single event. Hosts are always ready to put a little more water in the soup and even in the wine to take care of any unexpected guests that show up. So the disciples come with Jesus knowing they are unexpected but feeling comfortable that they will be welcome.

That explains, of course, why the wine ran out. A two-or-three day celebration called for a predictable quantity of wine, and so when an additional five or six people showed up....sure enough the wine ran out. Mary seized the occasion to say, very significantly to Jesus, "They have no wine." She does not ask him to do anything about it; she merely tells him, "They have no wine."

Now just a few words about the significance of the wine and the large quantity at the wedding feast. Six stone jars, holding twenty to thirty gallons each. By my calculation that is 120 to 130 gallons which is approximately 650 bottles of wine. Quite a party...huh ?

Not so....I think it is important that we remind ourselves of why wine was drunk in such an abundance in days gone by. Fresh drinking water, particularly in towns and cities was virtually unknown. Water has always carried a myriad of diseases and this was understood from tough personal experience not from reports from Roman, Jewish or any other Government Agencies. The response to this absence of good water was to use alcohol as a method of killing bacteria and preserving the fluid, the lubricant, necessary for all of us human beings.

Thus we can be pretty certain the 650 bottles of water were not turned into an equivalent number of bottles of merlot, chardonnay or champagne. Rather water with a modest alcohol content.

Jesus was put on the spot by none other than his own mom. Mary did not ask Jesus directly but in a modern translation Mary says to Jesus, "They're just about out of wine !!"

Jesus said "Is that any of our business Mother--yours or mine? This isn't my time Don't push me. She (Mary) went ahead anyway, telling the servants "Whatever Jesus tells you, you do it".

My research on this last paragraph found more contradicting commentary than perhaps any I have seen. Thus I will offer my own interpretation.

I have been in many Bible Study groups when we ask ourselves, "when did our Lord, at what age, did he realize he had power endowed in him to perform acts not normal for the average human being?

By responding "This isn't my time", is an indication that Jesus has some degree of awareness but not a conviction. He then has to make a decision. He has to test whether this growing awareness is real or not. Should he take the risk, here in public, in front of his family, his disciples , people who have probably known him all his life.

The message that shouts out at me from the words of this Gospel is the extraordinary degree of COURAGE and faith in God the Father that Jesus displayed in attempting the miracle that follows.

When I was a child I suffered from asthma and probably had depression wound into that condition. I was a bigwig in the local cub scouts troop and I just loved going every Friday evening, regardless..

The Dolan family at that time lived in a northern suburb of London. The main north south train line and local line trains ran about half a mile from our house. In England crossing gates are generally only in rural areas. The reason for this is that, unlike the US, in England and

Wales, the towns and villages were there first and the railways had to build under and overpasses, pedestrian bridges, whatever was needed to accommodate living places...not the other way round as in the US at least in the areas I am familiar with.

The cub scout headquarters was across the railroad tracks and this involved crossing a pedestrian bridge... climbing 30 iron steps up and 30 steps down.....this was a piece of cake when I was well, but on those occasions when I was fighting an asthma attack it was a bloody nightmare.

Our Lord's courage was well rewarded. Let us notice the simplicity of this account, how easily, how quietly, with such dignity this was done. Jesus accepts his Father's gift of courage. He says simply, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them to the brim -- with 120 to 180 gallons of plain, pure water.

Then Jesus said, "Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast." There was no prayer, no word of command, no hysterical shouting, no pleading with screwed-up face, no laying on of hands, no binding of Satan, no hocus-pocus or mumbo-jumbo -- nothing. He did not even touch the water. He did not even taste it afterward to see if it had happened. He simply said, "Take it to the governor of the feast."

What a beautiful, simple dignity and absolute faith that the courage given to him had produced in his first miracle. The water simply became wine.

One time an asthma attack had materialized on the walk to the cub scouts clubhouse. When I struggled to the top of the pedestrian bridge, I leaned on the rail overlooking the rail lines and on the far side was a large public house called the Windermere. On the side of the building facing me was a large sign that I had seen a hundred times but it never caught my attention. The sign, which Google shows me is still there says TAKE COURAGE. I remember when I saw that

sign, it made all the difference...it gave me the strength to successfully complete my journey.

The courage that Jesus showed in believing he would be able to perform the miracle described today, is a wonderful and inspiring lesson to us all. Every day we face challenges or as some people call them problems. They may be health related..... personal or a loved one or friend. They may be financial or conflict between us and other people whose motives or behavior we do not trust.

Whatever the issues we facethey are inevitable to a greater or lesser degree and we face them every day of our lives. Many of us put the issues to one side , thinking perhaps they will solve themselves or we'll deal with that tomorrow !!

The courage we are given through our faith in Jesus Christ enables us to deal with issues, remove them or make them tolerable and thus improve our lives.

I have a final comment.....I learned in later years the Take Courage sign on the pub is actually the name of the brewery that own the pub "John Courage Limited".

Thank you dear Lord for your gifts of courage and faith that help us so much every day of our lives..... Amen.

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