

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Today, the Epiphany light shines on the young man, Jesus, at the beginning of His ministry. We meet Him, His mother and His disciples at a wedding at Cana. This was the occasion for Jesus' first miraculous sign.

Now surely there is much that could be said about weddings and marriages in today's confused society. There are unrealistic expectations, abuse, cohabitation, divorce and remarriage, and now there are homosexual marriages, we're told, all making for a puzzling picture of marriage. Sin permeates all of these. And surely what Jesus said about divorce applies to them all, "*from the beginning it was not so.*" It's not the way God intended it.

But there's little actually spoken of the wedding in our text today, and so, I'll speak little of it also. Apparently the wedding went smoothly, the vows were exchanged, the two, a man and woman, were joined together as one by God, just as He does still today.

But this wedding, or more properly, the wedding feast becomes the occasion for Jesus to do the first of many miracles, for His disciples to learn who the Christ really is, and for them to believe in Him. You see the great lesson to be learned from this account is not that we need to use Mary as a "go-between" between Jesus and us. The Roman Catholics like to use Mary's intervention this way. The Apostle and Evangelist John is not trying to teach us the lesson: "*serve the good wine last,*" or better yet, "*don't run out of wine, unless Jesus is there.*" Nothing so trite.

You know the details of this account. I won't rehearse them again. But John does tell us at the end: "*This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.*" There it is. There is the purpose of these signs: to manifest His glory and to bring people to faith in Him.

Now Jesus did this sign without fanfare, in a way that is almost hidden, except for the few who knew what had happened: Jesus' mother, the servants, perhaps the disciples. John must have witnessed it anyway; he reports it. Indeed, when John says earlier in his gospel that, "*we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth,*" he's surely talking also about this manifestation, not just the Transfiguration that happened shortly before Jesus' death— and probably other signs, too. And especially His greatest glory in the humble glory of the cross wherein the Father glorifies His name.

Indeed, Jesus manifested His glory, though Jesus' hour had not yet come, for the Word became flesh not in order to perform what might later be viewed as a little parlor trick. He came serve, to be sure, but His service was not about saving a

bridal couple from a bit of embarrassment. His service would be in offering up His life as a ransom for the world. His service would mean that He, whose body was the temple, the dwelling place of God, would have to be destroyed, a bloody sacrifice for sin. His service would be in raising this temple up again in three days, blood again surging through His lifeless body, air again filling His deflated lungs. Shame would turn to glory, despair into joy, weeping into dancing, terror into courage, doubt into faith—for His disciples and for us.

For, you see, at this wedding, Jesus' concern and this sign were not just for the benefit of the bride and groom; they were not just to honor His mother. By this "*first of His signs*," Jesus shows His concern for you, for His church; the Divine Bridegroom was caring for His Bride. He was giving you something to believe in.

Saint John, in his Gospel, delights to point out the purpose of these things he calls "signs." They are miracles, and this miracle at the wedding at Cana is but the first of many such signs, all done in the presence of his disciples, and therefore in the presence of you, His church. Indeed, at the end of his Gospel, John tells us why Jesus did them and why the Holy Spirit moved John to include them in his Gospel: "*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*"

These signs are recorded so that you might understand what the signs of Christ are for—the signs of Christ are meant to awaken faith in you. The signs of Christ are meant to strengthen and nurture that faith. This is what they accomplish. The signs of Christ bring you life in His name.

So it was with the disciples then—so it is for us His disciples now. Through His sign of the Gospel, Christ's Spirit moves you to believe in Him and confess Jesus as Lord. Through the sign of Holy Baptism, Christ takes water, not to redden it into wine, but to wash away your sins, to give you the Holy Spirit, to give you a rebirth to new life and faith to unite you to Him. Through the sign of His Holy Supper, Christ takes mere bread and makes it the Bread of Life for the life of the world. He takes a cup filled with wine and makes it a cup of blessing, serving you with the blood that forgives you all your sins.

By these signs, Christ continues to come to you in your need, O sinners, cleansing you with water and word, sanctifying you, raising you up with Him, hearing your confession, speaking His absolution, feeding you with His very Body and Blood. Who can do these things? Jesus Christ, the son of Mary, who does marvelous things, miraculous things, signs that you may believe that He is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in His name.

But this weekend, being a time to speak up for life and to remember those whose life was destroyed before they had a chance to take their first breath, and who died without the benefit of the sign that combines water and the word, and gives rebirth by the Holy Spirit—what of their life? We heard yesterday from a woman from “Silent No More” who spoke of the hopelessness and shame of her situation that led her to kill the life in her womb, and of the guilt that plagued her afterward, a guilt so heavy that she couldn’t catch her breath. But by turning to the Lord, who forgives the iniquity of our sin, this guilt and shame was taken away from her. She could breath once more; knowing God was merciful and forgave her through Christ Jesus, she could also forgive herself. She could live again, renewed in spirit and in zeal to speak out for the voiceless.

I spoke to her after the march and thanked her, and told her of that mercy. She knew it already. That’s what animated her. Therefore, she could rest easy in that mercy for her child, too. Knowing God still promised her life, though she had killed her baby, gave her hope about her child, for he had done nothing so terrible. He died without committing an actual sin; only with the stain of original sin. He hadn’t even despised baptism. Could he have life, too? She put her trust in the God of mercy—yes. She may not have had the certainty for him that the sign of baptism provides, but she could still hope in God’s promises and in His grace.

Well, this is our God, and we hope in the same. We have the Gospel witness of marvelous signs that tell of His glory: water turned into wine. But we have more: greater signs, a heavenly washing, and today, a banquet table set here with Christ’s body and blood under bread and wine overflowing with forgiveness. And because of these signs, we believe in Him, and we know our salvation is sure. We know that one day Christ will send out His angels to gather us to the eternal wedding feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which has no end. And we will enjoy everlasting life in His name. Until that time, God grant us steadfastness to look to His signs and believe in Him.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.