

This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him. [John 2.9b; NASB]

Weddings are always joyous occasions, and so it was at this particular wedding in our text, which is the Holy Gospel for this 2nd Sunday after the Epiphany of our Lord. It is a typical wedding of the day, held on the typical day for weddings in the 1st century A.D., which is a Tuesday, "the third day." It starts out, from all appearances, as a pretty typical wedding. Little did that bride and groom know what would happen. The bride and the groom are there. The servants for the wedding celebration are there. The guests are there, including Jesus and His disciples, and, by the wonder of the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, you , too are at this wedding!

I.

Things seem pretty normal at this wonderful family affair. A new bride and groom begin a new life together. The long years of wondering—who will it be? Is there a spouse for me?—are now over. So, too, is ended that seemingly endless period of preparation for the wedding following the day of betrothal. No more preparing a place, on the part of the groom; and no more waiting and waiting in her old

family home, on the part of the bride. This is the day for change. The vows are exchanged, and now there is a new couple, united before God and blessed by Him. And so the celebrating begins!

Sitting among the guests at this wedding, it is soon noticeable how much some of the guests are into celebrating, more so than one might expect, indeed, more so than the groom expected, too, for soon the wine ran out; and let me note that this wasn't grape juice! It was wine, and it was gone! No more! Happy faces of guests about to turn sad! Moreso, happy faces of bride and groom and their parents, about to turn red with embarrassment. It is not a happy scene, as the guests began to come back to their tables empty glasses.

So, Mary intercedes with her Son concerning the need at hand. She takes her Son aside, and says to Him: "They have no more wine!" Now, Jesus recognizes this statement for what it is, a request that HE do something. Thus, He responds, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? Or, in a more literal translation from the Greek, Jesus says "Woman, what has this to do to you and to Me." Then, He adds the trump card, "My hour has not yet come."

Indeed, it hasn't yet come! Christ's hour comes some three years later, not at a joyful wedding but at a sorrowful sacrifice, the sacrifice that Abraham began and God the Father now completes, the sacrifice of His Son in the flesh.

Jesus does do something! He tells them to bring water and fill six large stone jars that were standing nearby. These jars that held 20-30 gallons each of water were special containers, set aside for use in Jewish ceremonial cleansings. So, soon there are well over 120 gallons of water, sitting in these huge stone jars. Then Jesus says to the servants, "Dip some of this from the jar and take it to the master of ceremonies." And they did, and upon tasting it, he is both amazed and relieved, for it turns out that there is more wine after all! And this wine is better than the previous wine. So he calls the groom to the side and says, "You certainly have a unique style, my friend. Most people serve the best wine first, and later [since it IS wine and NOT grape juice] they can get away with serving cheaper stuff to dulled pallets. But NO! You kept the best wine until now!

And there it was: More wine! Even better wine, in unheard of

abundance. This is going to be QUITE a wedding celebration! The groom and his bride smile, confused though they are. The servants smile, too, with really big smiles, for they saw what has happened here, though they wouldn't be believed if they explained to their friends what they saw. And so this wedding celebration is destined to carry on, for a long, long time.

II.

Saint John, in his record of the Gospel of Christ, delights to point out the purpose of these things he calls "signs." This miracle at the wedding at Cana is but the first of seven such signs, recorded in the Gospel of John. The others are: The Healing of the Nobleman's Son; The Healing of the Palsied Man; The Feeding of the Five Thousand; The Storm on the Lake; Jesus Walking on the Sea; and Jesus raising Lazarus from death. All these seven signs were done in the presence of His disciples, and therefore in the presence of His church. At the end of this Gospel, John notes: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book, but these – these seven – are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing

**you may have life in His name.”
[John 20.30-31]**

These seven signs are recorded so that you might understand what the signs of Christ accomplish in and for you. The signs of Christ bring you to faith. The signs of Christ strengthen and nurture that faith. The signs of Christ thus bring you life in His name. That process begins with the disciples. They see, and believe. Despite their lingering doubts, they continue to see, and they continue to believe, and they continue to have life in His name, through these miraculous signs. This is how Christ ministers to His bride, the Church.

United with the apostles of old, you too are the bride of Christ, His beloved church. Through His Gospel of the forgiveness of sins—through His miracles of Holy Baptism and His Holy Supper—Christ continues to serve you in your need. Today, the Word of Holy Absolution has been pronounced over you, and by His divine power, in that absolution the actual forgiveness of your sins was bestowed anew upon you. Today, the Holy Supper will be celebrated, and by Christ's divine power, His very body and blood, once shed for you upon

the cross, will today touch your lips, your bodies, your lives. By means of these signs, the Church learns what the servants knew, and more! By means of these signs, the Church believes in Him. By means of these signs, the bride of Christ continues to have life in His name.

No wonder the Church understands the Divine Service, especially the Lord's Supper, to be a foretaste of the great wedding banquet in heaven. Once Jesus turns mere water into wine, to the rejoicing of a family celebration, and at the same time, for the salvation and life of His church in the message of His sign. Soon, at the end of this present time, at the beginning of new and never ending time, the bride of Christ will celebrate anew the final and perfect wedding banquet of the Lamb.

So, in the meantime, the Divine Service is the foretaste of that great wedding banquet of the new heavens and new earth, again today. It is a sign from Christ come to you this day, so that by His grace you believe in Him, and thus are kept by Him for that greatest of all wedding celebrations which the Lamb of God will host for you, His bride, the church.