

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

A priest in our diocese has a doormat outside his residence that carries this message: "We serve only the finest wines. Did you bring any?" We're hearing about the fine wine at the wedding at Cana today for two reasons. One is chronological: According to John, Jesus worked this miracle at the beginning of his ministry, shortly after his baptism, which we commemorated last week. The second reason is more spiritual: After Jesus was born, three epiphanies manifested his purpose: the coming of the magi, the baptism in the Jordan, and the wedding at Cana. We sing of them in the hymn, "Songs of Thankfulness and Praise:" "Manifested by the star To the sages from afar... Manifest at Jordan's stream, Prophet, Priest and King supreme; And at Cana, wedding guest, In your Godhead manifest; Manifest in pow'r divine, Changing water into wine."

This third epiphany comes about not because of sages or prophets, but because of Jesus' mother. John's gospel is the only one that never tells us her name. He only refers to her as the mother of Jesus. At first this seems odd, yet many people introduce themselves as "John's mother," or "Jane's brother," or "Peter's sister." It's as if their relationship matters more than their own name. Some people give their first name and not their last. I catch myself doing this. "I'm Father Paul," I'll say. In my work the people who most commonly drop last names are the engaged. The bride-to-be sometimes calls to set up an appointment. I'll ask, "What is your fiancé's name," and often she'll say something like, "Jeff." I'll ask, "Does Jeff have a last name?" For her, the name does not matter; the relationship matters. So perhaps it's the same in John's gospel. The name of Jesus' mother does not matter; the relationship does.

What a relationship it is. After Mary and Joseph lost the twelve-year old Jesus, they found him in the Temple. He said, "I have to be about my father's affairs." Something similar happens here. Although we think of an adult Jesus at this wedding, elements of this story imply he is still growing out of adolescence. John says Jesus and his disciples were invited to the wedding, but only after clarifying his mother was there as well. When the wine runs short, Jesus' mother points this out. His response sounds like a kid blowing off his mother. He doesn't even call her, "Mother". He says, "Woman, how does your concern affect me?"

I know plenty of mothers who would put their son in his place if he said something like that. But Mary is not like other mothers. She is unfazed. She knows what Jesus can do. So she ignores her son's comment; she does not spar with him; she doesn't think up some clever riposte. Instead of telling him what to do, she tells other people what to do. Specifically, to the waiters, "Do whatever he tells you." And with that, she disappears from this story. She has learned you can put complete trust in her son. Whatever he tells you to do will be the right thing. Do it. Even though he is acting like a surly teenager, she has him put his divinity into action by moving his humanity from adolescence to adulthood.

When a soldier pierced the crucified Jesus, blood and water flowed from his side, just as wine flowed from water jars at Cana, and blood flows from wine cups at the eucharist. Believers partake of this changed wine because - even when God seems surly - we follow Mary's advice, "Do whatever he tells you." If we follow Christ, we shall one day drink the finest wine at the supper of the Lamb.

Sunday, January 20, 2019