

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

As Deacon Jim said in his homily last week, he and his wife Mary assist with marriage preparation for members of cathedral parish. Most couples contact us over a year in advance, more because it takes that long to reserve a venue for the reception than because of the length of our preparation. The Olshefskis take the couple through a tool that reaffirms the strengths they have already discovered and opens areas they may not yet have discussed. The couple then spends hours with online exercises that replace the in-person weekend available before the pandemic. Typically, the leaders of marriage preparation in a Catholic parish will say, “We’re preparing you for the marriage, not for the wedding.”

Taking nothing away from that, preparing for the wedding is also important. Weddings in this cathedral are exceptionally beautiful. We work hard at the music, the ceremony and the preaching to celebrate love and the commitment it demands. We hope visitors have a powerful encounter with Christ.

Today’s first reading and gospel both focus on a wedding, not a marriage. They delight in the joy of the wedding day. At Cana Jesus worked his first miracle at the prompting of his mother to manifest his divinity as surely as the magi saw it at Bethlehem, and John the Baptist at the Jordan. Jesus provided not just more wine, but a better wine to increase the joy of the wedding day.

The first reading comes from Isaiah, whose prophecies we often hear in Advent, anticipating the coming of the Messiah, and then after Christmas, to behold how Christ fulfilled them. Isaiah says to Jerusalem today, “Nations shall behold your vindication, and all the kings your glory.” That verse resonates with the gospel of the Epiphany, when the magi came from afar to adore the newborn king. Today’s readings bridge the days of Epiphany with the start of Jesus’ ministry, about which we’ll hear over the next few weeks.

Isaiah supports this bridge today with imagery about a wedding. “As a bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so shall your God rejoice in you.” “You shall be called by a new name.” “You shall be a glorious crown in the hand of the Lord.” “You shall be called ‘My Delight’ and your land ‘Espoused’. For the Lord delights in you and makes your land his spouse.”

As Israel returned home from exile, the people experienced God’s love as never before. They had considered themselves “Forsaken” and “Desolate”, but now it was as though they were getting married; they were the bride, God the groom. The entire Old Testament shows that people yearned for love and dealt with loss no less than we do. They experienced unfaithful spouses, forbidden attractions, divorce, childlessness and widowhood. They wanted a partner forever. Isaiah describes this new love this way: “your Builder shall marry you.” Your lover did not discover you; your lover made you, created you in a way that he would love you. No matter how much from exile they felt God had abandoned them, it just wasn’t true. God created them and loved them through it all.

Any of us will experience times of exile, loneliness, and yearning for long-lasting love. Anyone can dream of a fulfilling married life and a beautiful wedding to begin it. Isaiah would remind us we already have that union with God. We may not see it in times of strife, but God made us the way he would love us.

Sunday, January 16, 2022