

Last week some children in our ~~school~~^{parish} celebrated the sacrament of reconciliation for the first time. Usually when I reflect with parents of these kids about what our first confessions were like, we remember going to church full of fear, entering a dark room, and waiting for a tiny wooden door to slam back so we could talk at a disembodied man's voice. It was pretty frightening. But nowadays we try to emphasize the reconciliation this sacrament brings, the peace of mind, and the spirit of celebration. The kids make their confession face to face in a communal service so they have ~~can~~^{can} the opportunity to see the priest smile at them and ~~to~~ see their friends and family ~~at the same time~~. It's for these reasons that we tell the kids the sacrament of penance is a celebration. Last week when the service was over, one little girl was puzzled. She turned to her mother and asked, "When is the celebration?" Her mother said, "Well, I think that was it. That prayer service was our celebration." The little girl said, "Oh. But if it was a celebration, there should have been cookies." She's right. So when we heard the story we started redrafting plans for next year.

It is important to celebrate well. There's been a family study on this: Families who take the time to celebrate have much more unity. Not just birthdays and graduations, but any achievement made by a child or parent deserves time to rejoice. A good celebration helps us enjoy our family and friends and stimulates us to achieve something more.

It's fun to speculate about the celebration in today's Gospel. Jesus and his mother are invited to a wedding where they run out of wine. Incidentally, John's Gospel never mentions Jesus' mother by name. We know she's called Mary only by reading the other gospels. Anyway, at the reception, the two of them seem to have a little argument over whether or not Jesus should do something about the wine. It's not clear why Jesus hesitated and why his mother pressed him. According to John, Jesus had not worked any miracles up to this point, and it's fun to speculate that maybe his mother was getting a little anxious. "Come on, son, it's time to make something out of your life." Or maybe Jesus was waiting for a more pious opportunity: a distressed pilgrim in the temple, or a ship going down at sea. But not a party, not a wedding reception. "Not here, mother. This has no dignity." It's pure speculation, but maybe his mother sensed that a party is appropriate and celebrations are important.

This story occurs in our lectionary once every three years on the Sunday after the Baptism of the Lord. Prior to 1969 we used to hear it every year on this Sunday. There's an old tradition that Jesus began his life with three epiphanies, or three manifestations: the visit of the magi, the baptism in the Jordan, and the wedding at Cana. First the star shows us who he is, then the voice from heaven tells us, and now Jesus shows us who he is through his first miracle: He is God, ~~who has control~~^{who has} over nature. He can fill up what was empty and make us merry with food and drink.

When we ~~take the~~^{make} time to celebrate, we ~~take the~~^{make} time to enjoy the presence of God.