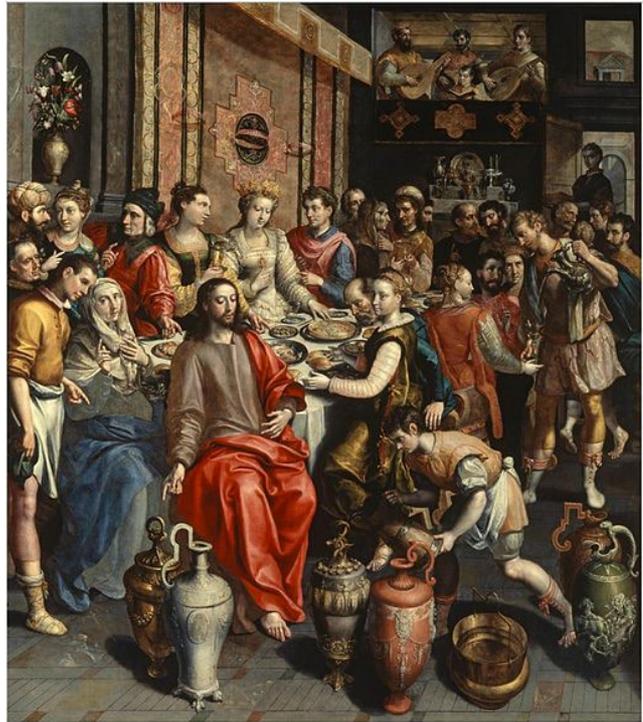


Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jesus directed the servants: "Fill the pots with water." And they filled them to the brim. "Now, fill your pitchers and take them to the headwaiter", Jesus said. And they did. When the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine (he didn't know what had just happened but the servants, of course knew), he called out to the bridegroom: "Everyone I know begins with their finest wines and after the guests have had their fill brings in the cheap stuff. But you've saved the best till now." John 2, 1-11



Scattered throughout the First or Old Testament are various indicators of changes that would take place once the Messiah had arrived. One of those indicators would be that the poor and other needy people would get a new lease of life (Isaiah 61, 1-5). In fact, Luke borrowed those words and put them into the mouth of Jesus as his mission statement (see Luke 4, 17-21). Another indicator of God's love let loose on the world when the Messiah arrived is contained in the image of the love between bride and groom at the time of their marriage. God's love for Israel is as intense and passionate as the love between a bride and her groom. That is described in today's first reading (Isaiah 62, 1-5). A third indicator of the arrival of the Messiah for the people of Israel would be an abundance of wine (Isaiah 25, 6). In today's gospel-reading, the story of the wedding banquet in Cana, John has taken from Isaiah the two images of marriage and plentiful wine to shape a story about the launch of the public ministry of Jesus, the Messiah.

Moreover, the more I delve into John's Gospel, the more convinced I am that its author had two clear objectives in mind: to demonstrate that Jesus was indeed the Messiah and that Jesus' mission was to reveal to the world God's extravagant love for humankind. What the other Evangelists call "miracles" John refers to as "signs", indicators of what lay ahead for the people as a consequence of the Messiah's coming among them. The first sign or indicator is wrapped up in the story of a wedding banquet, a story that has almost nothing to do with the bride and groom. The central characters are Mary, Jesus and the caterers. Those most impressed by what they witnessed were the disciples who were among the wedding guests. John writes of them in these terms: "Thus did Jesus reveal his glory, and his disciples believed in him" (John 2, 11).

Mary had watched her son grow into an adult and had seen enough of him to appreciate that he was on the verge of making an extraordinary impact on the world to which they both belonged. She was not going to see the newly-weds and their

families embarrassed by a shortage of wine. So, she took the initiative of drawing Jesus' attention to the problem. Clearly, she was quietly confident that her son would not disappoint her, for she set about instructing the caterers to follow whatever instructions Jesus would give them. As a result, six stone jars were filled to the brim with water from the well, which in no time was transformed into top-class wine - somewhere between 90 and 150 gallons of it. John does not record just how much of it was consumed or how the left-overs might have been distributed to all the neighbours. The wine in abundance is undoubtedly a symbol of the extravagance of God's love expressed through the goodness of Jesus.

I suggest that this story is something of a parable not just for the people of John's community but for us too. Mary's initiative demonstrated that she was not going to be a mere bystander and allow what should be a joyous celebration to fizzle out into disappointment and embarrassment. Therein lies a question for us who belong to a Church that is showing signs of drifting in the direction of passivity and lifelessness. Pope Francis has been appealing to all of us who see ourselves as card-carrying Catholics to embrace what is implied by his call to synodality and to not let ourselves get bogged down by lethargy. He is calling us to be participants in the revitalisation of one another and to involve ourselves in creating a community that really reflects in action the Gospel entrusted to us by Jesus. But, allowing God's extravagant love to invade our lives carries the risk of being open to change.

To continue the notion of this story as a parable, the wedding guests represent us, and Mary, one of the wedding guests, speaks up on our behalf, pointing out to her son that we are in need of an injection of life. She does not plead or persist. Her few words are an understatement of the situation in which her friends find themselves (and in which we, in turn, find ourselves). She merely makes an observation: "They have no more wine", confident that Jesus will rise to the occasion. We, too, have run low on energy and enthusiasm for translating the Gospel into action.

The new wine is a powerful symbol of hope and a tangible statement that God is establishing a new relationship of life and love with the people of Israel. God is offering them the elixir of life, symbolised by the new wine.

God's life and love is also offered to us, but to avail of it we need to be on the same wavelength as Jesus. For that to happen, we could do no better than to take the cue Mary gave to the catering staff: "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2, 5). That means keeping our ears open.