

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
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There was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there, and Jesus too, and his disciples. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.”

The way I've heard this explained is that Mary was concerned because she was some relative of the bride or the groom, and I've conducted enough wedding rehearsals to know that a motherly woman with family status can take a proprietary interest in such an event. So, it might seem that Mary was simply wanting the party to come off alright, but the implied request she made of her son was carrying a lot more freight than that. Every culture celebrates marriage because man and woman are naturally wired for love and commitment and family, but among the Jews this natural purpose had acquired supernatural dimensions.

Think of how God's covenant with Abraham was tied to his descendants, numerous as the stars in the sky, through whom God would bless the nations, a hint of a future messiah.

Think of how Pharaoh had attempted genocide on the Hebrews by having their newborn boys thrown into the Nile.

Think of how, when the Jews had been conquered by Nebuchadnezzar and exiled to Babylon, Jeremiah sent God's word to them there that they should build houses, plant vineyards, find good Jewish husbands for their good Jewish daughters because some day God would bring them back to the land of Israel.

For the sake of the covenant, for the sake of the future messiah, God's people must survive. This meant marriage, and children, and grandchildren. A Jewish wedding was a big deal, with built-in, supernatural implications.

These implications keep showing up in the Old Testament, where salvation is described in terms of a banquet, even a marriage banquet. Today's first reading is a good example.

“No more shall people call you “Forsaken”, or your land “Desolate”, but you shall be called “My Delight”, and your land “Espoused”. For the Lord delights in you and makes your land his spouse. As a young man marries a virgin, your builder shall marry you, and as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so shall your God rejoice in you.” (Is. 62:4-5)

The Prophet Amos describes the future abundance of God's blessings under the image of fruitful fields and vineyards. "The juice of grapes shall drip down the mountains, and all the hills shall run with it." (Amos 9:13)

Another passage in Isaiah tells us that on Mount Zion, "The Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines; juicy rich food and pure choice wines. On this mountain he will destroy the veil that veils all peoples, the web that is woven over all nations; he will destroy death forever." (Is. 25:6-8)

Mary, like any attentive Jewish mother, would have been aware of all this. And she was aware of something more-- her son was the one who would fulfill these promises of redemption, restoration, eternal life for Israel and for the whole human race.

The mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." That's right. We have no wine. Left to our own devices, exiled from Eden, from the face of God, from the tree of life the human race struggles by the sweat of its brow for a harvest of thorns, craves for love and gets domination, brings forth children for fratricide. Alienated from God we have become alienated from each other, and trample in a thousand ways on the image of God in each other; from abortion to euthanasia and every species of wickedness in between.

The mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." Indeed, we do not.

That Jesus understood is indicated by his response. "My hour has not yet come" would be a strange overreaction if all she was asking was that he save the party. And it wasn't just his mother asking. It was "woman", the new Eve, pleading for all the children of Eve. It was a marriage feast, symbol of all God' blessings including eternal life. It was the heavenly banquet about to fail because the human bridegroom had failed to provide. Was it not for this that the heavenly bridegroom had come? To provide what we cannot provide for ourselves?

"Fill the jars with water." 120 gallons! He was not saving a party, he was announcing the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven, a feast of rich food and choice wines, the mountains dripping with it. The hour had indeed come to destroy the veil that veils all peoples, the web that is woven over all nations, the hour to destroy death forever.