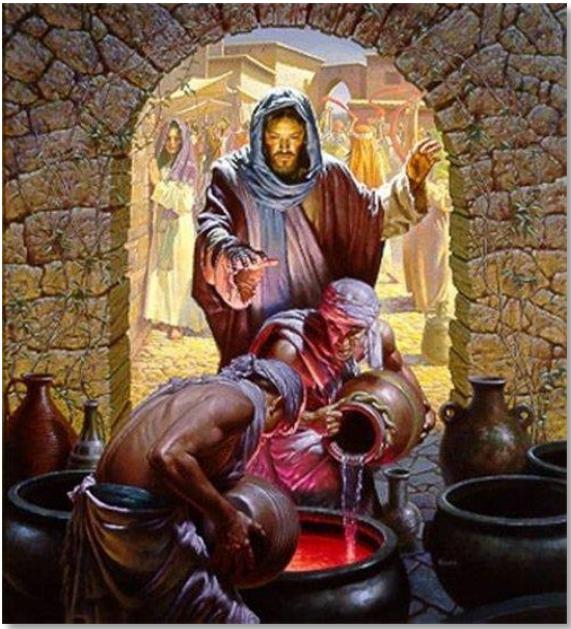


Homily for Sunday, January 16, 2022 – Second Sunday in Ordinary Time



I assume you have all heard the story of Jesus changing water into wine, and I also assume you have all heard many interpretations this story. Because the gospels cut in so many ways — symbolically, metaphorically, spiritually — there is no possibility of any of us saying, “That’s the real and the only interpretation.” The real interpretation is the one that makes sense for your life here and now. The real interpretation is the one whose outer truth resonates with some inner truth that has always been inside of you. When that outer truth aligns with the inner truth, it’s like an “aha!” moment. It is like a marriage is going on, a union is struck, and you’re no longer surviving on water but you’re rejoicing with well-aged wine. So, let’s play with those symbols, that the gospel writer John loves to play with, and see what they have to tell us.

There is lots of water that gets turned into lots of wine in this familiar story. Water, as you all know, is essential for life. Without water, there is no life on this planet. Space explorers, when searching for the possibility of life on other planets, always make it a priority to begin with a search for water. Until this last generation, we generally took water for granted, and many of us still do. Our negligence told us, not that long ago, that we could never pollute the Great Lakes because they were so vast. Now, it is the oceans themselves that are threatened.

Water speaks about what is essential in life; the thing we can’t get by without. However, there is another dimension of life called joy that is equally essential. Joy is best symbolized not with water but with wine. Water sustains us, but wine enlivens us, invigorates us, gives us meaning and purpose, gives us reason to leap out of bed to meet a new day.

About 20 years ago, I was on an eco-tour/vacation in Cuba with my friend Jeff, the former pastor here. Eco-tours take you to places that are not your regular, touristy hotspots; they are off the beaten path, far from the resorts. We had a 10-day glimpse of how typical Cubans live—just what our souls needed. One day, after the official tour part ended, we wandered around this little village on our own. Most people, through no fault of their own, live in hovels. From one of these shacks, a middle-aged woman spotted us and was vigorously signalling us to enter her house, her “shack.” I thought it was a trap to rob us of our money, as we were obviously tourists. Jeff thought it was a brothel. That’s what you get when two naïve priests put their collective brains together; you always think the worst! With reluctance, we walked across the muddied front yard on planks which were laid on top of the mud until we got to the front door. The festive and lively music got louder as we got closer. A father, a mother, two younger children emerged all wearing their everyday clothes or what we might be tempted to call “rags.” All of them were beaming with joy and pride. A bottle of wine, ready to be uncorked as well as a cake rested on a nearby table. A teenage girl, dressed to the nines, hair done up, jewelry, make-up, you name it, stood nearby. Her outfit was in total contrast to what the rest were wearing. Because we didn’t speak Spanish and they didn’t speak English, Jeff and the mother broke into basic sign language,

not real sign language, but the kind we've all used playing charades. After a couple of minutes, Jeff turned to me and said, "She doesn't want you, she doesn't want me, and this is not a brothel nor is it an ambush to rob us of our money. She noticed the camera around my neck and wants me to take a picture of her daughter on this special occasion of her 16th birthday." There probably wasn't another camera in the village, so Jeff got their address and made arrangements to send pictures back to the family once we got back to Canada. As Jeff was making signs to the mother of a plane taking off from Canada and landing in Cuba, and making all the sounds that go along with planes, I could tell the mother was pleased.

We later found out, through our guide, that a girl turning 16 in Cuba has always called for a big celebration. It is a sort of "coming of age" tradition. You might live close to the bone your whole life, but when your daughter turns 16, you hold nothing back and shower her with everything you possibly can. It's party time for her and the whole family. Or, as Jesus says in the gospels, "When the bridegroom is present, it is not time to fast; it is time to feast!"

I've since learned that even the poorest people, anywhere on the planet, will scrounge up enough money for a bottle of wine when the occasion calls for a celebration. In our rush to judgement, we might be tempted to say, "They hardly have a roof over their heads, why are they wasting money on wine?" The real answer has something to do with wine being the universal drink of joy. And secondly, I would ask you, "Have you never splurged on yourself or others, even just once, without feeling guilty?" If your answer is "no," then I would say, "you have spent your whole life in survival mode, and you have never experienced the joy Jesus came to give us." Jesus said, in this very same Gospel of John, "***I came that you may have life and have it in the full***". When Jesus is pouring out his heart in his farewell talk to his apostles the night before he is killed he says, "***I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.***" The purpose of life is not to get by, but ultimately it is to find joy. While there is lots of learning to be had at the foot of the cross, that is, in the world of suffering, ultimately we were meant to get to the resurrection.

Let's face it, though, the joy often seeps out of our lives, and we struggle to find it again. We survive on water, but we are far from raising our wine glasses and exclaiming, "Isn't life good!" This lack of joy may manifest itself in a writer who has writer's block and nothing creative is emerging. The wine has run out. It may show itself in the midst of a crisis—a husband who is dying, a child who is sick. The wine has run out. This lack of joy may be displayed in a marriage where a couple no longer love each other and they are dying on the vine. The wine has run out. This lack of joy may express itself in a job that no longer offers challenge or satisfaction. The wine has run out.

Mary notices that the wine has run out, and that a couple is about to start their married life together embarrassed. She notices, but she does not tell Jesus what to do. Mary is a model of faith. She holds and ponders things in her heart, things she doesn't necessarily understand fully. She doesn't dismiss anything, good or bad, but trusts that somehow—in this very experience—the hand of God ***is*** at work. When Mary tells Jesus, "***They have no wine.***" Jesus responds with, "***Woman, what concern is that to you and me?***" I'm not sure what to make of that and probably Mary was puzzled by it, too. Her response is not to tell Jesus what to do, but her response is to guide others towards her son. She says to the servants, "***Do whatever he tells you.***" In other words, "I don't know what my son, Jesus, is about, but he knows what he is about, so go to him and something good is sure to happen." When the wine has

run out of your life, when you've hit a wall, when you're overwhelmed, go to Jesus in prayer and tell him. He will always know what is needed in your life and in mine. Always!

Another interesting point about this story is that, even though Jesus performed the miracle and turned water into wine, he sought out the help of the servants. He said to the servants, "***Fill the jars with water, draw some out, and take it to the steward.***" If they didn't do that, then there was no miracle, no transformation. I believe the message of the gospel is not only that Jesus can transform the loss, the boredom, the pain, the betrayal, that any of us can feel; not only can he restore the hope that we once knew, and feel the love that has gone out of our lives; not only can Jesus do that, but he asks us necessarily, to help with the miracle.

This miracle of abundance reminds me of another miracle of abundance—the multiplication of the fish and loaves. In that miracle, Jesus only blesses the fish and loaves; it's the disciples who hand it out. When we allow ourselves to be align with the Divine, miracles work through our very hands and abundance is always the result...more wine than we know what to do with, more fish and loaves than we ever thought possible. It all starts with, "***Go to Jesus and do whatever he tells you.***"

When you reassure a bullied child, water turns into wine. When you put your hand on the shoulder of a grieving person, water turns into wine. When you share what you have with the needy, water turns into wine. When you take the time to listen to someone's life story, without judgment, water turns into wine.

I don't know what Jesus is about, but that's OK. What I do know is that Jesus knows what he is about. The past is the past. He is preparing a new start for each of us. He is preparing new wineskins for new wine. He has, indeed, saved the best wine until now.

Fr. Phil