

## **Pro-Cathedral**

15 January 2022

### **Opening Prayer**

God of wonders, at Cana in Galilee, you revealed your glory in Jesus Christ and summoned all humanity to life in him. Show to your people gathered on this day your transforming power and give us a foretaste of the wine you keep for the age to come. Amen.

### **Welcome**

You may be surprised to hear me say that this Sunday is our third "Epiphany." We are used to thinking of the feast of the Epiphany with the Magi and the star. Last Sunday, the baptism of Jesus was also an epiphany: This is my son, the beloved on whom my favour rests. Today is also a kind of epiphany: "he let his glory be seen."

### **Topic**

How can we read this story so that it speaks to us today? Perhaps this much might help.

### **Steps**

The wedding feast at Cana, found only in John's Gospel, is presented as the first action in the life of Jesus, again, only in the fourth Gospel. It is a wedding celebration, so it is marked by love, joy and abundance. As we saw from the first reading, it picks up the marriage symbolism of the Old Testament. Across the Old Testament, the metaphor of marriage is used to describe God's relationship with the people of Israel – a relationship of love and faithfulness, joy and fruitfulness. In the remarkable words of the first reading,

As the bridegroom rejoices in his bride,  
So will your God rejoice in you.

In these days when we struggle to believe in God at all, perhaps we do not often think of God rejoicing in us!

The second mark of the story is abundance. In my reading I adjusted the translation which said "each holding twenty or thirty gallons." In litres, that would be somewhere between 75 and 125 litres. Of course, it is not to be taken literally, as some preachers do. A priest in Cork once gave the actual number of bottles and also added that it was, of course, non-alcoholic wine!!! It is not about quantity but about abundance of joy. Later in the Good Shepherd discourse in John's Gospel, Jesus says,

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Finally, symbolically, the Gospel is about transformation. This is not just water into wine. There is also a hint that the age-old customs of Judaism – represented by the stone water jars – have been surpassed by what we may call the new wine of the kingdom. The good wine has been kept until now, as the chief steward says to Jesus, who is the

bridegroom in the story. As an aside, you may wonder where is the bride? The bride was first of all the people of Israel; in the Christian view, God's faithful love has been extended to all humanity. God loves us all with a faithful covenant love. In other words, we too today are in this symbolic *tableau*.

## **Conclusion**

So, what in the story for us? First of all, it is a reminder of the extraordinary faithful love of God for all of us – in the words of the first reading, our God rejoices in us. Secondly, Jesus came that we may have life and have it in abundance. This is our calling as human beings and as believers in Christ. Finally, we are called to change and not to be afraid to change. The very first preaching of Jesus was a called to convert and believe the Good News. The conversion from water to wine stand for moving from merely subsisting to flourishing, from simply surviving to exuberant life in abundance. The rest of John's Gospel unfolds in many stories – Nicodemus, the woman at the well – that can happen for us all.

A twentieth-century American poet, Richard Wilbur, caught the "fizz" of the story. He wrote a toast from his son's wedding, inspired by the Cana story:

### *Wedding Toast*

St. John tells how, at Cana's wedding feast,  
The water-pots poured wine in such amount  
That by his sober count  
There were a hundred gallons at the least.

It made no earthly sense, unless to show  
How whatsoever love elects to bless  
Brim to a sweet excess  
That can without depletion overflow.

Which is to say that what love sees is true;  
That this world's fullness is not made but found.  
Life hungers to abound  
And pour its plenty out for such as you.

Now, if your loves will lend an ear to mine,  
I toast you both, good son and dear new daughter.  
May you not lack for water,  
And may that water smack of Cana's wine.