

Epiphany III 2017

“This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

This morning we have the third and final event of our Epiphany trilogy: The changing of water into wine by our Lord. It is interesting that the first miracle Jesus chooses to do, his third “manifestation,” isn’t some grand performance for all to see. He doesn’t raise someone from the dead, or restore sight, or even feed the masses. For his first miracle, Jesus chooses to make wine. And notice, unlike his future miracles, only a handful of people see it; not exactly what we would expect for his big debut.

The other note of interest is where this takes place: Cana. Of all the places Jesus could have chosen to begin his public ministry, he chooses this obscure, backwater hamlet. How obscure was it?

Well, even to this day, its exact location is debated. If you go to the Holy Land today, you can tour an area purported to be ancient Cana. In fact, there is a church there that claims to have two of the water pots used by Jesus to make the wine, but nothing is certain.

The occasion of this miracle is a wedding feast. If you think weddings are elaborate today, you have no idea! During Jesus’ day, weddings lasted an average of seven days. It appears that Mary had been there for at least a day or two before Jesus arrived accompanied by Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathaniel.

John tells us that during the course of the celebration, the wine runs out. To us, this may seem unfortunate, but no big deal. But we have to remember when and where this took place. For the bride and groom and their families, this was a major social calamity and profound embarrassment. But more than this, it was considered a curse. A frequent quote of rabbis during this time was, “without wine there is no joy.” Thus, in Jewish thought, if the wine has run out, either you or someone in your family has done something to upset God.

Now enter the Blessed Virgin. Mary is obviously close to the couple, perhaps even related to someone in the wedding party.

What takes place next is what most people remember about this story. Mary approaches Jesus and exclaims, “They have no wine.” And look at our Lord’s reply, he basically says, “so what?”

Addressing her as “woman” might seem rude to you and I. I am well aware that if I approached any of ladies you after Mass today and addressed you as “woman,” it would likely be the start of an unpleasant conversation. But this was not the case in Jesus’ day. The actual translation here is, “dear woman.” Formal? Yes. Disrespectful? No.

But it does show us that Jesus is separating himself somewhat from Mary as he begins his public ministry. Although Mary was “mom,” He was God. And this is not the first time she has been reminded of this.

The phrase, “what have I to do with thee” translates, “why do you involve me”; a common way at the time to tell one to mind their own business.

But look at what Jesus says next: “mine hour is not yet come.”

This saying of Jesus occurs with great frequency in the Gospel of John. It typically refers to the time of his atoning death upon the cross and his subsequent exaltation.

Yet, here it clearly speaks to the hour of the beginning of his public ministry. It was, in fact, the manifestation of his glory on earth and in the flesh.

After this brief dialogue between Jesus and Mary, nothing more is said between the two, at least nothing recorded. Mary simply says to the servants, “do whatever he tells you.”

This demonstrates that she now understood that she must submit to the plan and will of God as it was being worked out in her Son’s life. Thus, she was confident that, though she did not know how Jesus would intervene in this particular situation, he would only do that which would bring glory to God.

Well, the miracle begins to unfold in verse six. John tells us that there were six stone water pots. Each of these would hold about thirty gallons. So we are talking about 180 gallons. It is clear that John gives such detail in order to highlight the magnitude and scope of the miracle that was about to occur.

Jesus tells the servants to fill the water pots. And look at how they fill them: to the brim. That is, they were so filled in order to demonstrate that they contained nothing but water, and nothing else could be added.

At some point soon after, it is changed to wine. Jesus doesn’t touch the jars or even say anything; he simply wills it.

Well, as we know, the water not only becomes wine, but very good wine as indicated by the governor or “host” of the wedding.

And finally, we see the reason for the miracle: the manifestation of Jesus’ glory. It was the first of many signs to come that would point people to God; in this case, his own disciples as John tells us that after witnessing this, his disciples believed on him.

I think there are three points we can take from this miraculous sign:

FIRST, that the miracle involves wine is deeply significant since the fruit of the vine is used in the Old Testament as an emblem of the joy associated with the Messianic age. In other words, the sweetness of wine is representative of the sweetness of the gospel itself-the new order that has replaced the old order.

SECOND, the miracle displays Christ as the fulfillment of the ceremonial aspects of the Jewish Law. This is dramatically illustrated by the filling of the stone jars to the very brim. Such observances had run their full course and so completely fulfilled their purpose, that nothing of the old order remained to be accomplished.

FINALLY, the fact that the wine that Christ provided was of such superior quality and taste, also reveals the glory, satisfaction, and sufficiency of the Grace he provides to sinners. In this case, the words of Mary, “they have no wine” indicates the profound hopelessness of those outside the Kingdom of God. Yet just as wine surpasses water, Christ gives new life to those who had previously only known spiritual death and darkness.

At first glance this miracle might seem somewhat insignificant. Jesus, being a good Son, helps his mom out of an unpleasant situation. But always remember to look beyond the obvious when looking at Jesus who uses the simplest of stories to illustrate the most profound truths.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.