

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

When one reads any passage in St. John's gospel the surest thing that we can rely on is that the meaning of the particular passage is not as straight forward as it would appear to be. Even a passage such as today's reading, where we are told that Jesus and his mother, Mary, and also his disciples had accepted an invitation to a wedding banquet. What hidden meaning, one might ask, could John possibly attach to his description of those festivities?

It has been suggested by some scholars that this wedding took place exactly seven days after Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. And so, we are reminded of the new beginnings that flow from baptism.

In the first verse we read that the event occurred on the third day. This third day has been calculated to refer to the time since Philip had called Nathanael to "come and see" – to see what or whom? The answer is of course Jesus, and in the short dialogue that follows between Jesus and Nathanael we come to understand that Jesus is the new Israel, greater than Jacob or Abraham, he is the Messiah! The third day also foreshadows Jesus' resurrection and therefore the day on which we celebrate the resurrection in our worship, i.e. Sunday.

The discussion between Mary and Jesus, although he would appear to be rebuking her, is no less mysterious, so that when Jesus states, "woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come."

Jesus is alluding to something quite different to what one might first expect. Jesus' use of the word "woman" could mean that she should now be recognized as the new Eve, who was created as the first woman.

Therefore, when next John writes about Mary, - at Jesus' crucifixion, he tells the disciple that she is his, John's, mother, thus reinforcing the idea of mother of all people, i.e. the new Eve.

But the discussion at the wedding has greater significance, in that Jesus is alluding to the glory, which will be revealed, at his victory over the cross. John expects us to look at this story of the wedding celebration, in conjunction with the messianic wedding banquet as described in the book of Revelation 19: 7-9.

So, we see that the gospel reading also emphasises the Eucharist, being understood as being synonymous with the wedding banquet, which we have come to church today, to celebrate.

The prerequisite for any banquet is, of course, the necessity to provide the guests with food and drink. Our gospel reading tells us how Jesus provides the wine, wine of such great quality and quantity, so as to exceed the requirements of the invited guests. Later on, in the gospel we will come across the feeding of the five thousand, which will tell us about the abundance of food that was provided for Jesus' followers. Jesus provides food, and he also provides, both in abundance. Why would we not want to serve him as our God?

However, at this stage let us continue to think about the wine that Jesus served at the wedding. We are told that they had no more wine at that reception in Cana in Galilee.

What John is telling us, is that the wine of the Torah, or of the Jews or of the old Covenant had run out. Now with the appearance of Jesus the new wine of the new Covenant is provided, in which grace and truth abound, the Torah having failed to manifest these elements. In the words of the master of the banquet "you have saved the best until now."

The meaning of that statement is that Jesus is now acknowledged as the proper bridegroom. You might also say that he is the husband of each and every one of us, in fact he is our Messiah.

He calls all people to be his bride to share in the magnificent banquet, a banquet of eternal life, lived to the full, in all the abundance that God alone can deliver. Those who accept this offer of marriage, become a new creation.

You are sitting here today, in this church having consciously or unconsciously heard Jesus' offer of marriage and we have responded by coming to church this morning, to share in Jesus' banquet. This we do by joining in this act of worship and in the celebration of the Eucharist, partaking in his body and his blood. The question is, have we come properly attired, are we wearing the right wedding dress? The dress which has not been muddied by pride and prejudice, by resentment and envy and greed, muddied by that which prevents loving relationships between husband and wife and children and families; muddied by our disregard for those in need etc. Are we dressed in compassion and mercy and filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit?

By accepting this offer of marriage Christians are expected to discard the clothing of the world by turning away from what is wrong and to follow and serve our Lord. To put it slightly differently, the offer of marriage is a call to be reconciled to God.

To achieve such reconciliation, the first step is to agree to be obedient to his will. Much as the servants in the gospel reading were told by Mary to follow Jesus' instructions, which they did to the letter and so the banquet was blessed with the new wine. Isn't it amazing that obedience could be construed as a tool of creation. It is certainly a tool that bonds us together as the bride and groom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the day that Lord has made for us to be recipients of the New Wine that is the substance at this very Eucharist. We have the opportunity to place all that is wrong in our lives, at God's altar and so be reconciled to him, or if you like, to have our wedding clothes washed clean in the blood of the Lamb of God. This is achieved by placing our muddied clothing, our disobedience to the will of God; our sinfulness, alongside the bread and wine which the celebrant offers to the Lord on the altar, where the Lamb of God carries them in his supreme sacrifice.

Therefore, there is no need for despair if we feel that we are not sufficiently well attired, we do still have the opportunity to correct what is wrong in our lives, but urgency is of the utmost importance. Urgency in repentance and forgiveness.

Our acts of worship are empty, clanging barrels, unless performed with the desire to make us worthy brides of Jesus, and so St. Paul in Romans 12: 1 tells us " Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship."

As I have said, we have answered Jesus call by our appearance here today. Part of that calling, requires each one of us to search our hearts and minds to find the areas of our lives that make us unworthy spouses of our Lord.

St. Paul describes it beautifully, so let us once again turn to his letter to the Romans and read verse 2 of chapter 12, where we are told; " Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good pleasing and perfect will."

Clearly, we are being asked to make a U turn and allow God's love to transform us into worthy brides who love him as we are expected to do. Each one of us will feel his love, if we allow him the freedom and space to live in our hearts, hearts not muddied by our wrong doings.

All of us know the story of Jonah. Remember the Ninevites listened to Jonah's warning, and they made an about turn in their behaviour and so they enjoyed God's blessing. Yes, they placed everything that was wrong in their lives and therefore they were washed with the blood of the Lamb. That is what it means when the bible says they covered themselves with sackcloth and ashes.

Our opportunity to take this marriage proposal and the banquet or Eucharist seriously, begins as we leave this church this morning, when, in many instances the first people we engage will be members of our own families.

We are then to consider whether these relationships are God like, or have we perhaps been selfish in our relationships with our families, have we perhaps taken one another for granted, have we allowed our love to wane? Will we lose face by asking for or offering forgiveness?

Perhaps it might be an idea for some spouses to consider reaffirming their marriage vows, to re-ignite the fire which might not be burning as warmly as it once did. If there are those of us who feel that this should be done in front of a priest, then I am sure that the necessary arrangements can be made with the clergy to achieve this end.

Others might want to give prayerful consideration to relationships with brothers and sisters, with ex friends, or with colleagues at work. We should ask the question of ourselves, what we need to do, to place old hurts behind us, without expecting some price to be paid, and humbly seek to cure broken relationships.

Finally, what is our attitude to the needy and those less fortunate than ourselves? How can we make a difference to their lives?

May the rich new wine that we are about to enjoy at our Lord's banquet make the difference in us.

Gift of anointing

May the words of our mouths and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.