

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C
Is 62:1-5
Ps 96 *passim*
1Cor 12:4-11
Jn 2:1-11

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The Christmas season is over. No more Christmas trees. No more decorations. No more carols. We're back to the green season, so-called Ordinary Time. Father ____ and I are wearing green but Mother Nature definitely is not. Judging by winter's icy, snowy grip, our land right now can be described the way Isaiah put it, as desolate and forsaken. But, as Isaiah assures us, better times are ahead. "As a bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so shall your God rejoice in you."

Beginning last week and for the next six Sundays, we have been and will be in Ordinary Time. And then, after Lent and the Easter Season, we will be back in Ordinary Time for many weeks until Advent and Christmas roll around again. Like each season of the liturgical year, Ordinary Time has an overarching theme, and the theme of Ordinary Time is . . . discipleship: what does it mean to follow Jesus?

Our reading from the Gospel of John gives us the familiar story of Jesus and his mother at a wedding feast in the town of Cana. At the end of the passage, St. John describes it as the first of Jesus's signs. Scripture scholars refer to the first half of John's Gospel as "the Book of Signs." The other three Gospels show Jesus performing lots and lots of miracles. Not so with the Gospel of John. There we see only a relative handful; the scholars differ on the actual number, but they all pretty much agree that John presents fewer than 10 miracles. And they're all characterized as signs.

Signs always point to a meaning beyond the sign itself; they point to a deeper meaning. What are the deeper meanings of this first of Jesus's "signs"?

First, God loves a good party. Some people try to live their lives as one big long party. Eventually, though, everybody learns that a meaningful life can't be spent partying. But parties do have their place, and in their place they are signs of God's love. Early in the 2nd century St. Irenaeus proclaimed that God's greatest glory is the fully alive human being. And in the 20th century French Jesuit Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin said, "Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God." Again, in our first reading today, the prophet Isaiah wrote, "As a bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so shall your God rejoice in you."

Second, God loves *lavishly*. The abundance of God's love is overwhelming. Do the math: "six stone water jars . . . each holding twenty to thirty gallons." That makes somewhere between 120 and 180 gallons of wine! And high-quality wine to boot!

Third, Jesus put his own plans on hold in order to serve the need that his mother brought to his attention. Jesus no doubt had a plan for his ministry, and I bet it didn't include helping with the catering. But this became the first of the signs he performed.

We heard St. Paul tell the Corinthian Christians that each one of them has a gift, a talent, some special aptitude. The Holy Spirit confers these gifts, talents, and aptitudes for the benefit of the Church as the pilgrim people of God. They are, St. Paul says, manifestations of the Spirit, given for some benefit. They are not the property of the individuals who possess them; they are to be used as God wills them to be used.

Let me close with the following meditation from Cardinal Newman, Blessed John Henry Newman: [*Meditations on Christian Doctrine*, I. Hope in God – Creator (March 7, 1848)]

“God was all-complete, all-blessed in Himself; but it was His will to create a world for His glory. He is Almighty, and might have done all things Himself, but it has been His will to bring about His purposes by the beings He has created. We are all created to His glory — we are created to do His will. I am created to do something or to be something for which no one else is created; I have a place in God's counsels, in God's world, which no one else has; whether I be rich or poor, despised or esteemed by [human beings], God knows me and calls me by my name.

“God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission — I never may know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. Somehow I am necessary for His purposes, as necessary in my place as an Archangel [is] in his — if, indeed, I fail, He can raise another, as He could make the stones children of Abraham. Yet I have a part in this great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connexion between persons. He has not created me for naught. . . .

“Therefore I will trust Him. Whatever, wherever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him; in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him; if I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. My sickness, or perplexity, or sorrow may be necessary causes of some great end, which is quite beyond us. He does nothing in vain; He may prolong my life, He may shorten it; He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends, He may throw me among strangers, He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide the future from me — still He knows what He is about.

“O [Creator God], I give myself to Thee. I trust Thee wholly. Thou art wiser than I — more loving to me than I [am to] myself. Deign to fulfil Thy high purposes in me whatever they be — work in and through me. I am born to serve Thee, to be Thine, to be Thy instrument. Let me be Thy blind instrument. I ask not to see — I ask not to know — I ask simply to be used.”