

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

Isaiah 62:1-5

Ps 95

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

John 2:1-11

So we've just heard the account of Jesus' first miracle – making extra wine for a wedding banquet! So much for those who think that Christianity is all about being severe and joyless.

At the risk of being a bit flippant, imagine the Apostles and Jesus meeting in some boardroom somewhere, getting ready to begin his public ministry, with the end goal being the salvation of the world. They're throwing ideas about how best to kick this thing off with a bang.

Perhaps one of them suggests that Jesus should start with the Transfiguration – get everyone's attention by really demonstrating his glory and majesty. "What about feeding the five thousand?" someone else asks. That would certainly impress people and show his impartiality and kindness. Or how about the raising of Lazarus? Give a sign of where this will all end up, with Christ's victory over the powers of death. Maybe, someone suggests, Jesus could journey to Rome—the power centre of the known world—and preach the Beatitudes right there in the Roman Forum, showing everyone the depth of his wisdom and his knowledge.

And Jesus just smiles. "No," he says, "I think for my first miracle I am going to invite you all home to a family wedding. And at the prompting of my mother, I'm going to change water into wine. That's going to be my first miracle." A miracle performed as a favour for friends of the family that is completely unnecessary for anyone's salvation. Personal, and overflowing—even wasteful—generosity. Yet another reminder that God's ways are not our ways.

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So often we tend to look at things from a perspective of scarcity (such as scarcity of toilet paper at the local shops!). And yet, in his miracles, Christ is displaying an approach of overwhelming abundance. The very nature of miracles is that they break the world's zero-sum logic. In a scarcity framework, if you give a unit of something to someone the result is that you end up with one less and they end up with one more. Yet the nature of miracles—and all occasions of love, which are by definition miracles—is that by one person giving to another both parties, their relationship, and the greater good beyond the two of them are all the better for it. Miracles and love have a win-win effect – a scarcity framework is inherently limited to win-lose, which in the long run becomes lose-lose.

We live in an age in which there is always the risk of even basic human activities becoming overly institutionalised and depersonalised. Talking to computers on the phone rather than real people; pre-set policies with no exceptions for unforeseen circumstances; corporations serving unseen shareholders more than needy customers.

How often do we hear about the perceived good of an institution or mission being placed ahead of the good of a person? And how often do we fear not so much violence of evil people, but rather the cold impartiality of an institution that decides that our job is no longer needed, or that a necessary medical procedure should not be covered by our health insurance, and so forth. And such tendencies towards cold institutionalism are even a risk for our Church, spread as she is throughout the world with a large network of parishes, schools, hospitals, and so forth.

To this end, it is worth recalling Saint Paul's teaching from in our second reading today. For me, two things in particular stand out: 1) the Holy Spirit gives gifts to people, not institutions; and 2), the Holy Spirit does not give out the same gifts according to the same measure. He chooses different people to do different things according to different degrees. All of these choices, says Saint Paul, are not made by God in view of a shallow notion of fairness—i.e. making sure that everyone gets exactly the same—but rather in terms of what is needed in a given situation.

Paul doesn't say "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same amount is given to each." He says "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit." He doesn't say "There are different workings but they are of equal importance." He says "There are different workings but the same God who produces them in everyone." Why is this? Because when God gives us gifts, he does so in an entirely personal and generous way. He's not comparing us to the person next to us – that's us who get caught up in that game. Rather, God focuses on what will best help us cooperate with his plan of salvation. He doesn't measure us one against another, so as to figure out who is more deserving: none of us are deserving. God does not act according to some worldly and arbitrary measure of fairness, or by predetermined policies. Instead, he builds us up together so that we complement one another, and so that together we are able to respond to his grace.

Jesus continually demonstrated this kind of personal generosity in the various miracles he worked. He did not put out forms and conduct interviews to see who were the most in need, or who were the most in error, or who were being tormented by demons the most. Nor did he collect resumes from the Apostles and compare them, selecting the most qualified. He encountered people, and he responded to who they were, giving them what was needed in order for them to respond to his plan of salvation.

And in the case of the wedding feast at Cana, apparently what they needed was wine, and lots of it. Perhaps we can imagine someone objecting: "Think of all the poor who have hardly enough to eat, and here he is making top-shelf wine for a wedding banquet." Why? Because that's where he was, and he loved those people, and that's

what was needed. His mother told him, “They are out of wine.” Well, what are you going to do, say no to the Blessed Virgin?

In a culture with such a strong emphasis on hospitality—such as the Jewish culture did and does—running out of wine at a wedding banquet would have been a major embarrassment. So, wine is what they needed, and that’s what he could give, so that’s what he gave. And then he moved on to help others. The seeming wastefulness of this miracle was probably deliberate, in that it points to the overabundance of God’s generosity.

Perhaps the lesson for us in all this is that, if God does not ration out his love, if he does not overlook providing for the simple needs of those around him, if he is willing to be especially generous to those who are his family and friends and who ask him for help – why can’t we? Do we find ourselves getting caught up in the logic of needing to be impartial and objective to the detriment of loving the person right in front of us? Does a desire to be fair or efficient get in the way of us being generous, when such opportunities present themselves?

If Jesus was not impartial, but rather was willing to overflow in an abundance of generosity when it was called for, why can’t we? The key—as Saint Paul reminds us—is to be attuned to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, who guides us and shows us how to respond to the people and circumstances of daily life with the love that is needed.

And it starts with those whom God has placed before us in our day-to-day lives: our wives and husbands, our children and parents, our neighbours and friends, and friends of the family. These were the people whom Christ chose to bless with his first miracle: his friends and family. The love of God spreads precisely in this personal and intimate way. So strive to be instruments of God’s love to those closest to you—even those who test your patience and rub you the wrong way. Because there’s not much point in planning big-picture projects if our own house is falling apart. And there’s not much point in saying that we love humanity, if we’re not able to show it to the person in the room next door.