

Second Sunday of the Year – January 17, 2016

Most everybody loves a wedding. Back in Jesus' time, wedding parties went on for days. Life back then was hardscrabble with few frills. So when poor people had an excuse to celebrate, they did it with gusto. Sober elders danced, sad widows laughed, girls giggled, and boys ogled. The wine flowed freely to oil the party. Until it ran out. If that happened, the hosts would be humiliated and the party of the year would fizzle.

Just the at Cana the quiet woman whispered something into her son's ear. His face went quickly from surprise to refusal to confident action. And the wine, better than ever, began to flow freely again.

This is a simple enough story on its face. But we know by now that the Gospel is always going to offer us more than what appears at face value – especially when it is the Gospel of John. To get at “the something more” going on at Cana's wedding feast, let's begin with Mary.

Mary is the first to notice a problem: “They have no wine,” she informs Jesus. Jesus' response is somewhat abrupt, even rude: “Woman, how does your concern affect me?” This is not the type of response one would expect from a son to a mother, especially Jesus to Mary. But, if the reply of Jesus to his mother is surprising, even more so is her reaction to it. Mary is not deterred. Instead, she tells the servants – and, by extension, you and me – “Do whatever he tells you.”

By doing this, Mary demonstrates clearly that the correct response to the presence of Jesus is trust – trust in his word, trust in his mercy, trust even in the face of apparent rejection.

Mary knows who to come to when the wine runs out. Jesus' hour is the minute that the wine fails. So, here's some good news about today's gospel; even when it seems that hope doesn't reach this far north in January, it really does. The story of the wedding feast of Cana is all about newness and hope: new wine, new grace, new beginnings. New life appears when spirits are drooping and hopes are deflated; new life appears when folks are embarrassed, running on empty and feeling the cold; new life trickles forth even when the wine has run out. How does this happen, you ask?

Well, consider this. The extravagance of the gift of gallons of wine at Cana mirrors the extravagance of the gifts of the Spirit that St. Paul praises in our second reading. The gifts we receive right from our baptisms are lavish. We were saturated with the Spirit's gifts back then and we still are today. So, maybe we can hear Mary's voice, speaking now to us: “They have no food, no shelter, no clothing, no freedom or peace or hope. So maybe we start calling on our baptismal gifts and begin or continue to act in Jesus' name. Jesus has told us what to do, so “do whatever he tells you.” Jesus will take what little we have – plain water or ordinary wine – and transform it and fill it with his power. He's good at that sort of thing.