

January 17, 2016 The Wedding Feast Homily:

My brothers and sisters, if you should ever attend a theatrical performance you will, in all likelihood, be handed a program by one of the attending ushers. Among those found in the program for the evening's performance are the characters listed in the order of their appearance on stage. Frequently, the play's principal character may not turn up until well into the first act. Although the first actors on stage may not be the story's main characters, they nevertheless have an essential role: setting the tone for all that follow in the play. For this reason, they are listed first in the cast of the show.

Today's gospel (Jn. 2:1-12) is an account of the miracle of the Wedding feast of Cana, one of the so-called luminous mysteries. If we were to consider today's reading a one-act play, the list of characters in this brief "script" are worth noting. And they are, in the order of appearance, the following: the mother of Jesus, our Lord, his disciples, the head waiter, the other waiters, the anxious groom and the brothers of Jesus, who are members of his clan.

Surprisingly, the first to appear on stage is the mother of Jesus. It is the only occasion in the life of Our Lord where Mary is mentioned BEFORE her Son! Her role on stage is not without significance. In the script her name comes up no less than three times. First, as an invited guest to the festive celebration; second, as one who is a helper, when she sees the humiliation of the wedding couple, she is moved with compassion and intercedes on their behalf; and third, she invites Our Lord to occupy center stage. She instructs the waiter, "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn. 2:5). It is a command based on trust in God's mercy and faith in the power of her Son. Tellingly, she never speaks again in scripture. Her very words seem to sum up the very purpose of her role on the stage (and her life as well!) And then she retreats to the background!

What possible lessons can we derive from today's gospel? First, at Cana, Jesus voluntarily multiplied the wine for the joy of people. He is resolved to rescue us from our sadness. He came to renew the joy of all mankind. Bear in mind that in Sacred Scripture wine is a symbol of joy. For example, in the 104th psalm (a hymn to God the creator) the psalmist writes, "that he (God) may bring forth bread from the earth and wine to cheer man's heart; oil to make him glad and bread to strengthen man's heart?" The English writer G.K. Chesterton once remarked that one recognized you were in a Catholic country, and not in the land of the Puritans, by the abundance of wine! Second, God never disappoints. He will certainly say something. In saying "Do whatever he tells you" Mary is implicitly acknowledging how solicitous Christ is for our welfare. Third, the evangelist is intent on assuring his readers that Jesus, in revealing his glory (Jn.2:11), is the long awaited Messiah, and surely worthy of our faith in Him.

In one sense, the Mother of Our Lord represents the Church, the new Israel. She is the model of faith and obedience. The wedding feast is a symbol of heaven and the covenantal relationship between the bridegroom (Christ) and his Bride, (the Church). Let us rejoice that we, the members of this congregation, have been invited to the wedding. Let us lift our glasses in praise and thanksgiving!

Amen!