

My friends in Christ, we continue with our Scripture pilgrimage through Saint John and the Bread of Life Discourse, which is the fullest and the most comprehensive teaching of the Bread of Life (which of course is Jesus Himself...and which of course we know *also* as the Eucharist). This Gospel text from Saint John Chapter Six is the Church's *leading* scriptural reference to the truth of the Eucharist as we know it and as we teach it. Our three-part journey of reflections is structured around three dimensions of Eucharistic theology that, I *hope*, would enrich our understanding and appreciation of the Eucharist as the most sublime gift to us that It truly is. We began last Sunday with reflections on the Eucharist as *Nourishment*; today, we consider the Eucharist as *Celebration*.

And our point of departure for our reflections today on the Eucharist as Celebration is one particular word used by Saint John throughout his Gospel narrative: "sign." Here, in the Bread of Life Discourse, in the specific text that is given to us today, the crowds asked Jesus, "What *sign* can You do, that we may see and believe in You?" In Saint John, that particular word "sign" has a *very* specific meaning. It is a sign...*from God*. It is a *miracle* – proof of one's favor with God and power from on high. There are *seven* signs throughout Saint John (the Feeding of the Multitudes that was our Gospel text *last* Sunday being *one* of them)...and the *first* of these signs is Jesus changing water into wine at the Wedding Feast at Cana. Jesus changed the water into wine, and the master of the feast tasted it and declared it to be the best wine of the wedding, and as Saint John reports, "Jesus did this as the beginning of His *signs* in Cana in Galilee and so revealed His glory..."

The Eucharistic overtures present both in the Wedding Feast at Cana and in the Bread of Life Discourse demonstrate a *direct* scriptural and textual link that forges a thematic bond between these two Gospel episodes.

We take a deeper dive into the Wedding Feast at Cana (Saint John Chapter Two); the whole scene begins with a reference to "the third day." But what is this "third day" exactly? Because if we consider the details carefully, and if we look at what immediately precedes this scene toward the end of Saint John Chapter One, then what we find is that there were actually *four* days that elapsed in the swift sequence of events immediately prior to the Lord arriving at Cana for the wedding feast.

But then, what *should* have been the *fifth* day, in keeping with the logical timing and sequence of these prior events, is instead the *third* day.... Why?

Well, allow me to answer *that* question with a question of my own: what is the most famous and most significant “third day” *ever* in the history of the *world*? (...I sincerely hope that each of you would offer “the Resurrection” as your answer!) On *the third day* after the Lord suffered His Passion and died on the cross, He rose again from the dead – that is, His glorious Resurrection. We profess this historical fact at each and every single Sunday in the Creed: “He suffered death and was buried, and rose again on *the third day*.” The ultimate supremacy of the glorious majesty of Jesus Christ here on Earth was brought at last to fulfillment on “the third day.”

And on “the third day” of the Wedding Feast at Cana, even though Jesus does not rise from the dead...He *does* change water into wine. But if water changed into wine is such a big deal...*why*?

Well, I propose that it is not merely the wine *as such* that is such a big deal...but rather, what the wine *represents*, what it *means*. “When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to Him, “They have no wine.”” The wine symbolizes the proverbial life of the party, but *not* in *this* instance *only* but all throughout Sacred Scripture. But “the wine ran short,” and the life of the party quickly wanes.

Jack Sparrow panicked in *The Pirates of the Caribbean* and asked, “Why is the rum gone?” We can imagine that the wedding guests – and especially the family of the bridegroom – were panicked and were asking, “Why is the *wine* gone?” Because the wine *is* gone and concern *is* growing that the celebration of the wedding feast would suffer and so diminish because of it.... And now, we come to the *next* Scripture link between Cana and the cross, the Wedding Feast and the Crucifixion. We considered “the third day,” and now we consider “the hour.” Jesus says to His mother, “My hour has not yet come.”

(Right *before* He says this, He dares to call His own mother “woman.” I do not recommend this! I called *my* mother “woman” once...and on “the third day,” I *finally* woke up from my coma!)

The “hour” *may* refer to the hour of His *death*...but *really*, it ultimately refers to the hour of His *glory*; and there are several passages throughout Saint John’s Gospel narrative wherein the Lord proclaims that His “hour has not yet come.” Saint John only reveals that “the hour *has* come” *after*

Jesus enters Jerusalem for the last time and the sequence of events starts that swiftly and inevitably will lead to His passion and death on the Cross – the “hour” of His glory. The constant references to “the hour” throughout Saint John foreshadow that singular moment of the Lord’s greatest glory on Earth: the Crucifixion (the third day after which: His Resurrection). The cross is not the nadir of the life of Christ; quite the opposite in fact, the cross is the apex of His self-sacrificial mission.

The crux, so to speak, of His mission on Earth was precisely that He die on the cross. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life.” If Jesus did *not* die on the cross, then His earthly mission would have failed. But He *did* die on the cross – and so, His mission was a complete success: “We preach Christ crucified...Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

Okay.... So let us now bring all of this back to the Wedding Feast at Cana and the theme of Eucharist as Celebration. Accomplishing His mission is the Lord’s crowning achievement, the apex of His entire earthly existence...and the precise moment when that mission is accomplished – when all is complete, when everything has been fulfilled with regard to all that God the Father had set out to do in God the Son’s earthly toil...that precise moment of the Lord’s accomplishment is found in Saint John’s account of Jesus’ very last moment before He dies on the cross: *Consummatum est* – “It is finished.” He Himself, with His dying breath, declares His earthly mission to be accomplished.

Now, we translate those words, “It is finished.” But a more literal (and accurate) translation of *Consummatum est* would be, “It is *consummated*.” And here is another Scripture connection that is a textual and thematic bond between Cana and the cross. In our modern use of the English language, consummation carries with it some rather distinct sexual overtones; for example, marriage vows are consummated (finished, or made complete) only when the marital act is achieved. In that moment, the two become one, and the process of becoming one is precisely that which is finished and made complete...which the Church has taught for centuries in her understanding of marriage theology.

This marriage theology of course is informed by the relationship of Christ and His Church; in the writings of Saint Paul himself, Christian ecclesiology (the study of the Church) maintains the tradition that the Church is the Bride of Christ. In his Second Letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul

writes that “I betrothed you to one husband” (that is, to Jesus) “to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” Furthermore, in his Letter to the Ephesians, he speaks of that great and beautiful mystery of two becoming one: “a *great* mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the Church.”

In addition to Saint Paul’s ecclesiology of the Church as the Bride of Christ, the Church has *long* upheld this very ancient tradition that the Church was born, as it were, from the pierced side of Christ on the cross; in Saint John, a mere four verses after the Lord uttered, “It is finished,” one of the soldiers “thrust his lance into His side and immediately blood and water flowed out,” the blood symbolizing the Eucharist, the water Baptism, both Sacraments being fundamental in the Church’s sacramental worship of God. Jesus is the new Adam, correcting where Adam had failed. And just as the woman, Eve, was borne of Adam’s side, so the Church was borne of the side of Jesus. That precise moment of His death, when “it is finished” (that is, when His mission is accomplished and all is complete) is the “hour” of His glory come to pass, and His own eschatological marriage with the Church at last is consummated.

The Lord’s “hour” on the cross (again, when His eschatological marriage with the Church is consummated) is foreshadowed in the Wedding Feast. These themes of marriage, self-sacrifice, and the “hour” are all connected in Christ, and the very heart of the paschal celebration of His death on the cross resides in “the hour” of His glory. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches us that “the sign of water turned into wine at Cana already announces the Hour of Jesus’ glorification. [And] it makes manifest the fulfillment of the wedding feast in the...kingdom, where the faithful will drink the new wine that has become the Blood of Christ.”

Wine is, as it were, the life of the party, symbolizing the joy of our lives. And weddings of course are occasions of supreme celebration. That Jesus suffered and died is a sorrowful brutality and most horrifying, that is true...*but*...there *is* cause for *rejoicing*, even *here* – because as we hear it prayed in one of the Preface options at the start of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, “His death is our ransom from death, and in His rising, the life of all has risen.” The gates of the Kingdom *now* are thrown open for the faithful because of His dying proclamation *Consummatum est*, because of what He accomplished on the cross. And life eternal is what awaits us now, because there is no greater

cause for rejoicing and celebration than Beatific Vision, everlasting life with the Lord Himself, the angels, and all of the saints in Heaven, forever and ever... The wedding is when the couple's new life together begins, when a new family is made. Just so, because of what Jesus achieved for us on the cross, *our* new life begins and *our* new family is made – again, a family in Heaven where God is our Father and the angels and saints are with us.

At the end of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, when the priest elevates the Eucharistic Species, he proclaims to the congregation, “Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him Who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the Supper of the Lamb.” Once more, the theme of feast is central to the Eucharistic celebration. And elsewhere all throughout the Liturgy of the Eucharist, I would challenge you to listen for how frequently we are given the invitation to *celebrate*.

But by way of conclusion for our reflections today, I would direct our attention toward one final instance of celebration in the Mass. And I would remind all of us that what I am about to say is *real*...pure, irrefutable, and beautiful *reality*: the whole of the heavenly court is with us, whenever and wherever the Mass is celebrated – every angel and saint, every soul in the panoply of Heaven.

Catholics today seem to have a tendency to place highest importance on celebration, on the dire need that the people of God be present there, actively engaged, participating in the liturgy; and of course, that is true. But even whenever and wherever the Mass is celebrated *only* by the priest all alone, all by himself...the entire court of Heaven is present there...and every angel and saint in the Kingdom is gathered around him as he celebrates the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

And we give voice to this pure, irrefutable, and beautiful reality at the end of every Preface when the priest says these (or similar) words to the Father: “And so, with Angels and Archangels, with Thrones and Dominions, and with all the hosts and Powers of Heaven, we sing the hymn of your glory....”

May it be, then, that in the midst of every Mass in which we are engaged and participate in the spirit of holy joy, we will be mindful of the celebration commencing all around us...and at the heart of every celebration is Jesus Christ, Who gives Himself to us in the Eucharist as we continue our pilgrim's journey of faith here on Earth toward halls of heavenly realms.