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There is an interesting parallel between this morning's lessons and a story from the life of St. Benedict of Nursia. St. Benedict is that great 5th century saint of the church who is often called the Father of Western Monasticism, and truly one of the great fathers of Western Civilization. The monasteries he founded proved to be unshakeable bastions of faith and learning which withstood the onslaught of the hedonistic Roman Empire, and the chaos of the Vandal invasion. This is in small part because Benedict himself was repulsed by the excesses of wealth and vice as a student in Rome. Benedict chose to leave it all behind, even his respectable, noble family. Yet, after years as a hermit, his reputation for holiness and miraculous deeds began to grow. His fame soon reached a nearby community of monks who had recently lost their Abbot. Hearing of Benedict and his many miracles and incredible teaching, they invited him to be their Abbot. As probably their reputation preceded them, Benedict tried to gently refuse, explaining that as his spirituality and theirs differed greatly and that his lifestyle would prove too stringent for them. They insisted they could be obedient, and so, touched by their pleading, he followed them to their monastery to begin his new life as their Abbot.

It soon became evident that his strict code of discipline was too much for them, and rather than share that with him, they resorted to trying to kill him by offering him a glass of poisoned wine. Thankfully, Benedict's custom was to make the Sign of the Cross over the jug, before pouring the wine. As he did so, the jug broke, shattering into many pieces. Realizing what had come to pass, Benedict turned to them without anger or vindictiveness, and said the prayer, which is inscribed, till this day, on the Cross of Benedict: *Begone Satan! and suggest not to me thy vain things; the cup thou offerest me is evil; Drink thou thy own poison.* And then he turned to the monks and said, *God forgive you, brothers. Why have you plotted this wicked thing against me? Did I not tell you my customs would not be in accord with yours? Go and find an Abbot to your taste, for after this deed you can no longer keep me among you.* Having said this, Benedict left to return to his hermit cave, but he did not remain a hermit for long. The miracle of the shattered wine jug would prove to be the beginning miracle for the great work God had planned for him. People from all walks of life began to flock to Benedict, merchants, monks and students, even hermits scattered throughout the mountains. All these came to him to learn how to follow Christ, how to grow in holiness, how to live in the world, and

not be of the world. They came searching for a deeper meaning to life than their world could offer.

This is just one story in the life of St. Benedict. Like many of the great saints, there are numerous miracles and situations that occurred in his life that bear a striking similarity to the miracles of Jesus. This is why St. Benedict and others, like St. Francis, and St. Therese were declared saints, because their lives remind us of the life of Jesus. Their lives became a reflection of Jesus, just as our lives should. St. Benedict is unique though, in that the miracles surrounding his life seem to reflect the miracles of Jesus closely. As we find in this morning's Gospel, the ministry of Jesus begins with wine, that symbol of hospitality, and so does the ministry of St. Benedict. However, there are problems with the wine, which stem from an insufficiency in hospitality. In the Gospel this insufficiency is merely from poor planning. The bride and groom had invited Jesus and His disciples to their wedding, but apparently more had shown up to the reception than was expected. Likewise, in the life of St. Benedict, monks had invited him into their abbey, and then suffered from an insufficiency in hospitality. And like the newly-weds the monks also did a bit of poor planning. But they planned to cover up their fault by poisoning Benedict. They did not count on his making the sign of the cross over the wine to reveal their plot and poor hospitality, whereas Jesus graciously covers up the newly-weds faulty planning by miraculously supplying better wine than had previously been served.

And Benedict did not seek revenge. He went his way peacefully, left it all in God's hands. As St. Paul instructs the Romans, *Recompense to no man evil for evil...If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men... Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for It is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay saith the Lord.* The Blessed Virgin Mary acts this out in a different way. She, who had probably pitched in to help in the kitchen during the reception saw the need, that the party was running out of wine, perhaps she realized the problem before the bride and groom were even aware. And though running out of wine was no great evil, she did not *repay evil for evil*, she sought a solution to the problem. And so, as she so often does, the Blessed Virgin Mary went to Jesus with the problem and begged Him to do something. She pointed out the problem to Jesus and then she left the problem in His Hands, and she encouraged the servants to be obedient to what Jesus told them to do saying, *Whatsoever he tells you to do, do it.*

Whatsoever he tells you to do, do it, in this miracle was no hard thing to do, it required no great asceticism, just simple obedience. Jesus told them to fill the jars with water. The very same jars that had likely been used to wash the hands and feet of all the guests in attendance. It was a simple request, but one that made no sense. How does one get wine from pouring water into the large containers used for washing? If anything, the servants may have been slightly repulsed by the idea. And then comes the even stranger command from Jesus, *Draw out now and take it to the governor of the feast*. But they had just filled the great containers with water, and now these lowly servants are asked to take it to the one in charge. Regardless if Jesus turned the water into red or white wine, from the servant's position this command must have been an exercise in trust. Their obedience was rewarded, the hospitality of the bride and groom are rewarded, and the wedding gift that Jesus gives, water turned into wine, is far better wine than had been served previously.

The Gospel, and St. Benedict's miracle gives us cause to reflect on the necessity and challenge of inviting Jesus into our lives. We must invite Him into our marriages, we must invite Him into our homes, to be head over us, just as Benedict was invited to be Abbot. We have a desire for life, for completion, and fulfillment, a desire which only God can meet, which we cannot fully comprehend. And often we confuse this desire with every other manner of thing or person, instead of going straight to the source of our lives. And even if we have invited God into our lives, we are surprised to learn that He often asks of us more than we are comfortable with. He challenges our obedience, hospitality, and trust in Him, not because He is sadistic, but because He desires a relationship with us. He wants us to invite Him in, to ask for His help, and to leave our problems in His hands. And this in itself is a challenge because popular Christian culture is simply to invite Jesus into our lives, and then to treat Him only as a guest.

But God wants more. This is the Epiphany which we celebrate this morning. God has manifested forth His glory and radical humility to all people. He was born in the flesh for our salvation, He crossed the old lines of Jew and gentile, by manifesting Himself to the Magi and gentiles of old. And now He wishes to manifest Himself to each of us personally. The very same God who *makes rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys... who turns the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs*. The very same Incarnate Lord who manifested forth the Wisdom of God at the tender age of twelve, and who turned water into wine, is the same God who wants to come into our lives and transform us.