

In 1508 at the age of 33, Michelangelo was asked by Pope Julius II to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Contrary to what we may think, at the time this was a startling request. Michelangelo was a sculptor and for the most part was unfamiliar with painting. It is rumored that his rivals convinced the Pope to hire him, hoping that he would fail and lose favor. For this reason, Michelangelo tried to refuse the commission, but the Pope was insistent. So, obedient to the Pope's command, Michelangelo reluctantly took up a paint brush and ordinary oils, and over the course of four years he transformed the ceiling into an extraordinary work of art which still transports viewers to God today.

Centuries before that, another relatively unknown young man who was also at the age of 33 was invited to a wedding with His family and friends. While everyone was enjoying themselves, His Mother approached Him saying that they had run out of wine. His somewhat cryptic response continues to be reflected on even till today. "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come."

To our modern ears, this seems like a refusal from Jesus, and yet His Mother immediately turns to the servers saying, "Do whatever he tells you." Perhaps He needed a little prodding from His Mother... perhaps He needed His Mother to realize that it was time for her to step back so that He could step forward and be obedient to the will of His Heavenly Father. Either way, Mary recognized Jesus' willingness to act and told the servers to be obedient to His commands.

Contrary to what we might sometimes expect, Jesus' commands to the servers are simple and ordinary. "Fill the jars with water... Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter." We all know what happened next. Through their obedience to these simple commands, ordinary water is transformed into extraordinary wine.

In speaking about this event, John doesn't refer to it as a miracle but rather calls it a sign. In this, John is telling us that the most important thing about the miracle is what it points toward. When Jesus responds to His Mother, He says "my hour has not yet come." This is a clear reference to Christ's coming Passion. In this sense, Jesus' first miracle points us forward towards the Eucharist where ordinary bread and wine is transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. And yet, we cannot stop there. The Eucharist itself is only a sign and foretaste of the Heavenly Banquet in which we will hopefully one day share. Therefore, the miracle of the wedding feast at Cana ultimately serves as a sign of the triumphant wedding feast of Christ in Heaven when all evil is vanquished and we share in His glory.

What does this, however, mean for our lives as Christians? I think that there are a few lessons which we can draw from reflection on this mystery. The first point is that we must be obedient to God's commands in our lives. This was modeled for us in many different ways by Mary, our Mother in Faith. In the Gospel of Luke, one of the first things that Mary says is "behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word." Similarly in the Gospel of John, some of Mary's first recorded words are when she tells the servants to "do whatever he tells you." Mary submits herself to God's will and then instructs us to do the same.

The second point that we can take away is that God's commands are simple and ordinary. Jesus told the servers to fill the jars with water and then carry it to the headwaiter. This doesn't seem to be the stuff of miracles and probably even seemed strange to the servers. Elsewhere in Scripture, Jesus told Peter and Andrew to cast their nets over the other side of the boat. Jesus told the Apostles to offer bread and wine in memory of Him. All of these things are simple and ordinary, but when they are done they bring about extraordinary things.

In our ordinary lives, we often ask ourselves why we don't see God's miracles. Today's Scriptures tell us that we often don't see miracles because we are looking in the wrong places or refuse to do the things that are asked of us. This reminds me of an account in the Old Testament when the leper Naaman was commanded by Elisha to wash in the River Jordan to be healed, but he first refused because it seemed too easy. While it is true that God wants to break into our lives in extraordinary ways, He does it using ordinary things. He first asks us to simply trust Him and do what He commands. Love God and our neighbor. Put out into the deep and cast our nets. Offer Him the gifts of bread and wine. Turn away from our sins and selfish behaviors.

To say that God will ask us to do ordinary things does not mean that they will always be easy. Mary's life was turned upside down when she agreed to bear a child. The servers in today's Gospel had to struggle back and forth to the well, carrying over 150 gallons of water. Despite the fact that God's commands might sometimes be difficult or require change or sacrifice on our part, when we are obedient to God He can transform us and bring about extraordinary things in our lives. These things, as amazing as they might be, are never meant to be an end in themselves because they are meant to be signs of the true glory God is preparing for us in Heaven.

Michelangelo's enemies thought that he would fail, but through obedience to the Pope and use of ordinary paint he was able to accomplish an extraordinary thing which still inspires people today. In a similar way, our enemy, Satan, tries to bring about our failure as well, but through obedience to God's commands in the ordinary things of our lives we will accomplish extraordinary things and be victorious unto eternal life.