

*But thou hast kept the good wine until now.*

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Today is the last Sunday in this year's Epiphany season. At this point our lessons have revealed to us the revelation of Christ to the gentile wisemen, to the Jewish wisemen of the Temple, the Jewish Theologians, and spectacularly at His baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. All of these events are prophesied and foreshadowed in the Old Testament. Yet today we encounter Jesus' first miracle of turning water into wine, a miracle which has no equal in Old Testament foreshadowing. This miracle proves the very nature of who Jesus is, as was prophesied by Isaiah, *Behold, I make all things new*. Jesus works a miracle which has never been done before and which has never happened since. He uses ordinary stone water jars of that day, jars which had never been used to hold wine. And He works this miracle with witnesses, not telling them to keep it a secret, not telling them to *tell no man*, because this is a sign of His power to change and transform life. That transformation which He will accomplish through His very presence, and through His own death and Resurrection.

At this point in the Gospel, Jesus has already been baptized by John the Baptist, with spectacular revelation, the sky is parted, the dove descends, the voice is heard. He has also chosen His disciples, revealing to Nathaniel on their first meeting that He already knew his heart, that he was a man without guile, and that He had seen him while yet he was under the fig tree. It is with these disciples, these extra guests, that Jesus attends a wedding in Cana of Galilee, a place that was home to plenty of Gentiles and Jews. We hear so much of His miracles, parables, and run-ins with the Pharisees and Temple priests that it may be difficult to imagine Jesus enjoying Himself at a wedding. It is thought that one of His relatives was the bride or groom, which may explain why the Blessed Virgin Mary was concerned when they ran out of wine. Weddings in Jesus' day typically lasted for an entire week. During the festivities they served the stronger wine first and weaker wine last. To run out of wine was unheard of and, thus, a great embarrassment. The family had invited everyone they knew to come and celebrate, perhaps more had come than was expected. We get a glimpse of how large the crowd was by the six water jars, jars between four and six feet tall, which would have been used for everyone's ritual hand washing. So it was that a family's entire reputation hung in the balances of the court of public opinion.

From this miracle we learn two important lessons. First, the Blessed Virgin Mary gives us a lesson in prayer. Notice she humbly comes to her Son, with

something as trivial as a depleted wine supply. In fact, she is more concerned with the situation than the wine steward, and so she does not shy away from asking our Lord. She sees the need and tells her Son, and then goes back to the servants and commands them *Do whatever He tells you*. She is already in an act of complete obedience and acceptance of her Son's answer, a perfect spirit of prayer. This is the message that the Blessed Virgin Mary is always giving, *Do whatever my Son tells you to do*. She is always pointing back to her Son.

The second point is that Jesus was more concerned with hospitality and sympathy than with the rigors of keeping the Law. Thus, He has no issue with commandeering the six water pots intended for everyone's ritual use. He commands the servants to fill the pots to the brim with water and then tells them to draw out some of the water and take it to the steward of the feast. At some point between these two actions of obedience the water became wine. Jesus works His first miracle through the obedience of others. What is also remarkable, though, is that the stone jars held twenty to thirty gallons of water each. Jesus turned this water into 120 to 160 gallons of wine, which would come to about one thousand bottles. The wine which Jesus contributes is far better than the wine that had been previously served, and likely more than had been bought by the bride's family.

One thousand bottles of wine, that is far more wine than has ever been needed at any wedding we have ever attended. It was probably also more wine than was needed to finish out the celebrations for that particular wedding. And this reveals to us another aspect of Jesus's nature. He is concerned about hospitality, He is sympathetic to our needs, even those we might consider trivial, and if we are humble and obedient in hearing His answer to our prayers, we will find that He is far more generous than we can imagine. He is not a minimalist when it comes to hospitality, or even in distributing His Grace to us, for that matter. His grace and mercy, like His one thousand bottles of wine, are more than enough and just what we need. If we are obedient to His commands in acts as simple as filling jars with water and drawing out water, the Lord will bless our obedience with superabundant mercy. But we must not forget that first we must invite Christ into our lives. We must invite Him into our weddings, into our marriages, into our families, into every situation. He cannot provide His mercy, grace, and overwhelming hospitality to us if we have left Him out. For this is the only way we can experience Christ's transforming power in our hearts, in our lives, and in our families, is if we have first invited Him in.

But with the invitation to Christ into our lives, comes the response, *do whatever He tells you*. The Lord wants to show us exactly how His Grace is meant to overcome evil with good, by blessing even the humblest of invitations and our smallest acts of obedience. Jesus uses minimal acts to His advantage, but He is not a minimalist Savior. His mercy, goodness, and grace far exceed anything we ever *desire or deserve*. The wine that Jesus provided at the wedding was far better than the wine they drank before. Just as the ministration of God's mercy and goodness through Jesus Christ was better than what had come before through the old law. And still yet, Jesus saves for us the best wine for last. We have the opportunity this morning for another invitation to Christ, another act of obedience of pouring out and drawing forth, for the wine which we drink this very morning is His blood of the New Testament, far better than the wine He gave at Cana! Amen.