

2nd Sunday of Year

The first of the signs given by the Lord during his public ministry was the turning of water into wine at Cana. This miracle gave a glimpse of his glory as the Son of God and helped establish the faith of his disciples. We can also see it as foreshadowing the wonder of the Eucharist when he transforms bread and wine into his Body and Blood. However, by coupling this story with Isaiah's vision in our first reading I think the Church wants us to focus instead on Jesus presence at the wedding of this couple and the blessing he gives them at the beginning of their married life.

In Catholic theology what distinguishes the sacraments from other holy actions or blessings is that they were established by Christ himself. We know that Jesus baptised, imparting the Holy Spirit to people, that he forgave sins, gave us the Eucharist at the Last Supper, breathed on the disciples on Easter Day and went around laying his hands on the sick and healing them. However, there is no record of Jesus celebrating a wedding and for this reason the Reformation tradition does not regard marriage as a sacrament but essentially a civil contract establishing a state of life blessed by God. In ancient times the Christian community had no special rite to celebrate marriage. It was enough for the couple to express their consent in accordance with local custom. Christ is present not through the outward ceremonies, although these grew up to express and reflect our faith and to surround marriage with the prayer of the community, but in and through the mutual love of the couple. Christ blesses this love by his indwelling presence as he blessed the couple at Cana 2000 years ago. The Catholic understanding derives primarily from the words of St Paul in Ephesians 5, where he describes marriage as a great mystery (in Latin '*sacramentum*') through which is expressed the relationship between Christ and the Church. Christ is the groom – the Church is the bride. Christian couples who marry embody this relationship and live it out day by day. Marriage is a sacrament because it points to the life of Christ lived out in their relationship.

Central to that living reality is the different gifts of the Spirit they bring to each other. Chapter 12 of 1Corinthians concludes the list of gifts by saying that the greatest gift is that of love – the one gift that does not pass away. This greatest gift is expressed in the very variety of the other gifts that they bring to each other – in God's plan a couple complement each other bringing different strengths to help each other's needs, shortcomings and weaknesses. Sometimes on the radio or television you hear adverts for dating websites inviting you not simply to find your perfect match but 'someone just like you'. I think this last point is misguided. A couple certainly need shared values and to be open to each other's gifts but not to see their own reflection in a mirror. That would turn them in on themselves instead of helping them to grow and flower. Love is about appreciating and rejoicing in the other for his or her own sake not simply for what they can bring us.

Baptism brings each of us unique and precious spiritual gifts making us new human beings, perfecting the natural gifts we have already received. In today's second reading, St Paul seeks to show us how all these individual gifts work together. The gifts we are given are not just for our own benefit, but also for others, and yield their greatest fruit when we use them in harmony with the gifts of others. For St Paul, we are all parts of one body, guided by Christ, who is our head. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to work together, and to use these gifts in the way the Lord wants of us. The Holy Spirit creates unity among different human beings by building on our different gifts, and drawing them together for the common good.

This is especially true for marriage. A couple are to bring these wonderful gifts to each other. They are to receive the gifts of the other person in love. True married love will not be self-centred or self-seeking, but reflect the love we see in Jesus. St Paul continues by describing the qualities such love needs – patience, forgiveness, and generosity of heart, willingness to overlook failings. Marriage is not an easy calling, but Jesus walks with every married couple just as truly as at Cana. If we put our natural gifts at his disposal, at the disposal of our spouse, Christ will bless them with his grace. Like the couple at Cana we have a powerful friend and intercessor in Our Lady. Today let us ask Mary, Queen of Peace, to pray for us, that we may be blessed with peace in our world, and in our families, and with unity among all those who acknowledge her Son as Lord.