

2nd Sunday of Ordinary Time “Greywater into Wine”

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After I was ordained in the spring of 1999, I was thrilled that summer when I was offered the privilege to celebrate my first wedding Mass for friends I knew in High School. We were classmates once upon a time at Kennedy High School, continued to be classmates by attending the University of Washington and being actively involved with the Newman Center there. What an honor it was to celebrate their marriage at Sacred Heart in Bellingham on a lovely day in August 1999.

The second wedding I celebrated was the very next day at the request of the pastor I was assigned to. They were a very nice couple. Both of them had several previous marriages. I think the bride had three previous marriages and the groom had four. They had gone through the annulment process however and were found to be free to marry in the Catholic Church. As an aside, I always have a deep respect for people who make a good effort to have their marriage blessed by the Church.

The funny thing however is, since this was only the second time I celebrated a wedding ceremony, and I didn't know them very well, I was noticeably nervous during the ceremony trying to get all the words right. After the ceremony, the groom came up to me with a smile, slapped me on the back and said, “Father, you did a good job out there however you looked more nervous than we did”. I regrettably replied, “Well, you have done this more times than I have.” This was not the shiniest moment of my career as a priest. Because of the annulments, in truth, this was their first sacramental marriage, in a matter of speaking, because the others had been annulled. And the Church is, of course, a welcoming spiritual home to those who have broken marriages too.

We all know that the institution of marriage is very important to Jesus in the Gospels, so much so that we rightfully call marriage a Sacrament. In the Gospel of John, it is at a marriage when Jesus begins his ministry by turning water into wine. By the way, I find it interesting that John's Gospel doesn't use the word “miracle” like the other Gospels do. The author uses the word “sign” instead, a remarkable moment that points to some greater reality. That this wine Jesus made was better than the first wine offered to the guests is symbolic of the new covenant with Jesus Christ being better than the covenants of old.

However, what is also very significant to me is the water that Jesus used to make wine. The Gospel says that the water Jesus used was for Jewish ceremonial washings. What this means is: this was not just water. It was greywater. It was water used in part to wash the wedding guests' feet. The message here is that Jesus can take whatever greywater that is polluting us right now and turn it into fine wine. This is therefore a sign that points to Jesus' sincere desire to forgive our sins and to redeem us. I think this is a hopeful message for all of us, but I think that this is perhaps also a hopeful message for couples who may be struggling in their marriages right now. Jesus can take whatever greywater in our lives and turn it into wine if we let him.

Isaiah of course foreshadowed this in our first reading. You see, Isaiah likened God's covenant with His Chosen People to a failed marriage. The theme you get over and over in the Old Testament is Israel's infidelity to their covenant with God. Isaiah prophesied that a savior would come who would cleanse the Chosen People from their iniquities and provide them a new covenant. This wonderful future is spelled out by Isaiah in our first reading, "No more shall people call you 'forsaken,' or your land 'desolate' but you shall be called 'my delight' and your land espoused...as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so shall your God rejoice in you." This is the language he uses.

This explains why, throughout the Gospels, Jesus likened the Kingdom of God as to a wedding banquet. He also had straight forward and unchangeable teachings on the nature of marriage that both his society, and ours for that matter, have difficulty with and that many struggle with. It is important to notice, however, that Jesus' preoccupation with marriage is very revealing to us of how Jesus saw himself. Jesus saw himself as the bridegroom eloping with his bride, the Church, in a cosmic marriage, where the two become one, humanity and divinity, no longer two but one. We just celebrated the anniversary of this marriage on Christmas, our high feast day of the incarnation. It is a marriage that, thank goodness, cannot be undone. Even if we are unfaithful, God always remains faithful.

You see, Jesus knew full well how sinful we can be and how far we can fall. God could have easily dismissed humanity as a fickle spouse with fidelity issues. In marriage, however, Jesus teaches that the two become one. What God brings together, no one should separate. Since God has now married himself to humanity and become one flesh with us in the marriage of the incarnation, we can now imagine how Jesus could then suffer and atone for our sins in his very flesh. His body, you see, is inseparably one with his spouse. This is a wonderful commentary on our salvation. Because our humanity is inseparably one with Jesus' divinity, we can rise with him on the last day. The only person that can frustrate this divine plan is me. The only person that can frustrate this divine plan is me.

My friends, if we were to identify the greywater in our souls right now, what would it be? Think about it. What is the greywater in my soul right now? Maybe it isn't just in my soul but perhaps something going on in my relationships at home, in my marriage, religious life, etc. Maybe that greywater represents my fears, my anxieties, my prejudices and pridefulness? What is the greywater in my heart right now? The invitation this Sunday is to truly allow Jesus to be our bridegroom as the Church is his bride. Have you considered that in the sacrament of baptism, our souls were espoused to the Lord like a wedding when the two become one. The Good News is on the days we are unfaithful, Jesus always remains faithful. On the days we fall down Jesus is always there to pick us up. What we celebrate this Sunday is: Jesus can take any greywater we give him and turn it into fine wine.