

The Miracle at the Wedding in Cana

Biblical text: John 2:1-11

Fr. Lorenzo's commentary: Like many stories from the Bible, the story of the wedding in Cana can be read on so many levels: as a miraculous manifestation (“epiphany”) of Christ’s glory and power (note its occurrence “on the third day” [2:1]); as a proof of Christ’s blessing of not only the institution of marriage but of weddings and wedding receptions; and as an early example of Christ’s transformation of ordinary matter into something of surpassing excellence (not unlike the sacraments).

My favorite aspect of the story, however, is perhaps how it sheds light on the relationship between Jesus and his mother. It is hard for me not to grin when I read Jesus’ query to Mary: “Woman, what is that to you and me?” Read with a certain tone of voice, one could imagine that as something that an exasperated Archie Bunker might say. “Woman” was a polite form of address in first-century Palestine; David Bentley Hart renders it “Madam” throughout his translation of the NT. The question is sincere: “Madam, what is that to you and me?” In other words, if they’ve run out of wine, that is their concern. We need not interject ourselves in things that are not our business. Yet more than that, Jesus will not work miracles to benefit his family and friends. He will not use his authority over nature to impress or to alleviate minor inconveniences—only to heal the afflicted and show forth God’s glory. Jesus will not compromise this principle—not even for his mother. Mary seems to understand this, but still wants to help those who are overseeing the wedding reception from committing a faux-pas, so she puts it in terms acceptable to her Son—“Do whatever he tells you.” Mary is no longer pressuring Jesus to use his power, but is putting the ball in his court, so to speak. If he wants to intervene, it will be on his terms—“whatever he tells you.” Out of love for his mother, he changes the water to wine and so “reveals his glory” (2:11).



Commentary from Kiki Hayden (perspective: Eastern Catholic theology):

The wedding at Cana became an icon when, through Christ’s signs, it revealed Christ’s glory to his disciples. [As] Madeleine L’Engle writes, “...an icon...is an open window to God.” Orthodox and Eastern Catholic priests speak of traditional painted icons in the same way: Icons are windows. An icon provides catechesis that transcends the boundaries of literacy and education. Iconography is crucial to Eastern Christian spiritual formation because icons have many layers of meaning. Regardless of a person’s background or education, they can look at a spiritual image, understand some part of the story, and relate to the depiction of a human experience. God can infuse truth and hope in the hearts of everyone who views the icon. Like the marriage at Cana, [a Christian wedding] is an icon—a window [into] God’s love.

Even within the strict traditions of painted icons in Eastern Christianity, iconographers bring personal interpretations to their creative work. I have seen several different icons depicting the wedding at Cana. In many, Jesus and Mary are conversing privately in the corner. In some, they are instructing the servants. In one, they are larger than life, embracing the newly married couple like children. In its own way, each icon is a reminder to “Do whatever he tells you.” The story of the marriage at Cana shows us how Jesus abundantly blesses weddings and reveals his great love through weddings and receptions... After all, [a Christian] wedding is an icon, a beautiful and unique window to his divine love.

Discussion Questions:

- “An icon is an open window to God.” In what ways does your life act as a window to God for others? How might you be more “transparent” in showing forth His glory and goodness?
- If you are married, what is something you can do this week to show forth God’s love in your marriage? If you are not married, what can you do this week to demonstrate your love for the people in your life?
- The Blessed Virgin Mary tells the servants to “Do whatever [Jesus] tells you.” What is Jesus telling you to do this week? What duties has he called you to take up? What activities has he called you to lay aside for a time?