Epiph3(2024)

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

 Warmest greetings from snowy Colorado, although we only got seven inches but we did get to minus 16 last Monday night.

Epiphanytide is short this year with Easter arriving on March 31st. While we have until next Saturday evening, today is pretty much it. Next week we enter *Gesimatide*.

 Before that though on Thursday is the feast of the *Conversion of St. Paul*. Since I doubt that we will have a service I thought I would spend a minute or two on St. Paul.

We speak of his **conversion**, but given Paul's change in attitude the word “surrender” might be also accurate since he “gave himself up” to God.

 As we know, just outside Damascus, St. Paul saw a light and was suddenly knocked down to the ground. Paul heard a voice call his name, and inquired who it was. Jesus both answered and then recognized Paul's mule-headedness as he pointed out to him that it is “hard for thee to kick against the pricks”. (Never been quite sure what those were…., but not fun.)

 When Paul learned it was Jesus, St. Paul asked... what the Lord wanted done. With this reply of his we see Paul's... **surrende**r to Jesus will. One obvious sign of the change within him was that he began to go by his last name, Paul, casting off his very Jewish name.

 In reply Jesus, in words which Paul might not have heard since he was a lad, said: "Arise, go to Damascus and you will be TOLD... what you MUST do.” Quite a change from Paul seeking to do what HE wanted to do. In keeping with this new “attitude” to life we learned that the now blind Paul then was LED to Damascus and onto a very different life. One of doing **Jesus**' will, **not** his own.

*"Jesus saith unto them, fill the water-pots with water. And they filled them to the rim. And he saith unto them, draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast."*

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 Jesus turning water into wine is the opening miracle of his ministry. As we shall see, the setting is most important to the Church and Western society. Jewish weddings then were even more festive occasions than weddings are today. They were small scale versions of the Royal Weddings we have seen from England over the years.

 By custom, a Jewish maiden was to be wed on a Wednesday evening as part of a multi-day celebration. After the traditional very last minute haggling about the arranged price (I now want a camel and **three** goats for my daughter), which usually involved LOTS of wine, a short ceremony occurred. After the ceremony the couple was paraded under a canopy through a torch-lit town.

 Couples back then did not go off on a honeymoon, but rather had a week long open house where they literally were addressed with royal titles. Whatever they requested...was taken as mandatory. Given that most couples lived near poverty their whole lives this week almost certainly would be their most luxurious time of life.

 Not unsurprisingly wine was a major staple at such weddings. Just as brides' parents today make a list of invitees to try to determine how much food and wine and other liquor to have, the parents of the GROOM in Palestine then also done calculations. Almost certainly, as is still true, they would have had extra on hand.

 Yet, despite the groom's parents best planning the festival was in danger of going “dry” ...running out of wine. In the Middle East even today **hospitality** is held in the same esteem as is **honor** in our military. To be unable to offer one's guests a libation when sought would have been a terrible *faux pas*. Similarly, public drunkenness was also a social no-no. (The Old Testament has a few things to say about it.)

 Jesus' mother, Mary, was aware of the impending shame awaiting the newlywed couple and the groom's parents when she approached her son to ask him to help. This showed her own deep faith that Jesus both could **and** would help out this family whom they probably new quite well.

This is deducible since Cana is within eyesight of Nazareth and that Mary felt comfortable telling the servants what to do. (Imagine attending a friend's wedding banquet and **telling** the caterers where to set up tables!)

 Thus, it also is most likely that Jesus was quite happy to be at this religious ceremony for someone, maybe even both parties, that he probably knew quite well. It was in this traditionalsetting that he performed his first miracle.

Because of this Jesus is seen as the actual Blesser of weddings and of the institution of marriage. It is why marriage is considered a Sacrament (like Confirmation or the Eucharist): something which makes one holier.

 The Church teaches that this miracle manifests the nature of the mystical union which is" betwixt Christ and his Church". Thus, since very early days the Church has been viewed as Christ's **bride** and as "she". Traditionally, nuns taking their final vows, which include perpetual chastity, dress for the ceremony in white, as they are going to their own wedding to Jesus.

 This first miracle at a **traditional** religious wedding of a Jewish man and a Jewish woman along with all the symbolism of the Church being called his bride and "she" is primarily why the Church always has encouraged believers to marry in church. One gets "hitched" in front of a judge but one *transcends* into the nature of a Sacrament when married in church (whether indoors or outdoors).

In such a setting the couple actually perform the Sacrament together, as is also possible with Baptism. The priest or deacon are the symbol of the Church's blessing and witness of her approval.

 Traditionally all this was explained beforehand to betrothed couples during pre-Cana wedding preparations with the priest. Also explained was the theology from St. Paul that the two will become "one flesh", in a way similar to how we eat Jesus' **flesh** and drink his **blood** at Holy Communion. Long married couples experience this as they begin finish each other's thoughts.

 Likewise, traditionally explained before marriage has been that a natural purpose and **end** of marriage is, where physically possible, the procreation of children. This belief is actually behind the common ground for annulments by States even **today**: that one party hid that he or she did not want to have children.

 The joyous occasion of Jesus' first miracle, at a traditional religious wedding of **a** man and of **a** woman, manifests not just his divine power over nature. It also manifests how beliefs about marriage have changed in recent decades.

 No doubt, if Jesus had **wanted** to make the point that the institution of marriage really needed to change, that in an empire famed for total excess he could pretty easily have found another situation to work a miracle. Something that radical definitely **would** have been recorded by his Jewish apostles.

 Ever since God told Adam and Eve to "go forth and multiply" mankind has been very busy doing just that with the nuclear family predating government. Its natural bonds create the molecules which become the fabric of society. A natural end for marriage always has been to bring more children into the world, not to live as animals but, even for non-believers, to live as a loving, caring unit, a **family.**

 Parents, whether they believe or not, actually get to do something that does not occur elsewhere on earth. They get to make something **completely** new. They get to create something not existing ever before on the earth in any way.

People build cars and buildings from **pre**-existing materials. A new baby is **not** already on earth in another form. Since God quite literally is sharing His divine power over creation believing couples are supposed to be always open to the idea of having children, even if their physical state makes that extremely unlikely.

 Ultimately we need to remember that Jesus blessed the concept of "the family" by himself being born a son to Mary and Joseph who were married to each other. While moved to the first Sunday after Christmas in the modern Church, in our *Missal* the Sunday **after** the Epiphany is the traditional date to honor “the family”.

Jesus also blessed marriage itself with this first miracle of his at a country wedding in Cana of Galilee. (His present of about 12 plus firkins of wine equals safely over 500 bottles of VERY good wine.)

Thus, I believe it safe to say that Jesus actually doubly blessed marriage through his life and ministry (as well as this couple in particular). No doubt this is why marriage and the nuclear family are under attack today as Western society becomes post-Christian. Amen. +