

## Second Sunday of Ordinary Time: Celebrating Cana

Although the Christmas season is over and we are in the Ordinary Time of the year, today's Gospel once more returns us to the Epiphany. There are actually three epiphanies of the Lord. The Orthodox and Byzantine Churches celebrate them all together on the same day. The Roman Catholic Church separates them. So we had the wise men two weeks ago, and the Baptism of the Lord last week. During the year C readings, that we are now in, the third Epiphany, the turning of water to wine at Cana, is celebrated this week. This is seen by the Church as an epiphany because it is the first time that Jesus Himself manifested His divinity to His disciples. The *Gospel of John* calls it the first of His signs.

When we Catholics use the term Cana, we are usually referring to marriage. Marriage preparation programs are often referred to by many as Pre-Cana programs.

Jesus was present at a wedding celebration at Cana in Galilee. We Catholics believe that the Lord is present in the celebration and in the living of the sacrament of marriage. The purpose of the Pre-Cana meetings, be they conferences, meetings with married couples, or as we do here at St. Ignatius, meetings with a priest, the purpose of Pre-Cana preparation is to help the couple prepare for the sacrament, prepare for the Real Presence of the Lord in their marriage uniting His Love to their love for each other.

Actually, the preparation for marriage begins many years before the bride and groom meet. The child, teen or young adult who nurtures his or her relationship with Christ is preparing for a marriage centered on Christ. He, she, is preparing for the sacrament of marriage. Many young people pray for their future husband or wife, and pray that they recognize this person when they come into their lives. They look for someone with whom they can pray for the rest of their lives. They look for someone with whom they can celebrate life in every aspect of life, physical, emotional, and, particularly, spiritual. They must not choose someone based solely on that person's physical qualities. Yes, chemistry is important, but the physical must be united to emotional support, and, even more important, infinitely more important, to the ability to share the spiritual life.

Most people spend many years in school preparing for their careers. That is why they go to college, or take special courses. This is good. But the young need to spend time and energy preparing for their lives with Christ. If Christ calls them to Him through another person, they will be ready for Him. For the vocation to the sacrament of marriage is the call to Christ through their husband or wife. Then, if so blessed, the vocation to the sacrament of marriage will flow through the natural result of their physical and spiritual love, their children, their love for Christ and each other, loving them back. As parents, they will seek new ways to guide their children to the Lord. At the same time, they will be strengthening the Kingdom of God by increasing the number of committed Catholics.

At the wedding feast of Cana Jesus turned water into wine. This was the beginning of the hour, the time of the Lord's passion, death and resurrection. Events would now rush towards that evening when instead of changing water into wine, Jesus would change wine into His Blood, Holy Thursday. Events would rush to that afternoon when the Body and Blood of the Lord would be sacrificed on the cross, Good Friday. Events would rush to that morning when all would be offered the New Life of Lord, Easter Sunday. This is the Lord's hour, his time to redeem us.

The changing of water into wine, the beginning of the hour, teaches us about sacrifice. Those marriages that seek the Lord as their Center are seeking to love as He loved, to love with a sacrificial love. The husband must put his wife before himself. The wife must put her husband before herself. The needs of their children must come before the needs of the parents. This is sacrificial love, expressed countless times in the daily routine of the Catholic family.

All Christians are called to sacrificial love whether this love is expressed within a marriage or within the life of the committed Catholic single. The great gift of marriage is that the married are continually challenged with ways to love sacrificially. Occasions present themselves daily whether it is doing the shopping or laundry, changing the baby, getting the child to soccer or dance, working harder to provide better, taking the cars in for an oil change, or simply, getting off the couch to play with the kids. All are expressions of sacrificial love which are the routine of marriage. All are ways of living the sacrament of marriage.

To you who are looking to marry someday, prepare yourselves by nurturing the Presence of the Lord in your lives. Seek out that person with whom you can pray. Yes, chemistry may draw you to many cute guys or beautiful girls, but do not be shallow. Allow the Presence of the Lord to draw you to a person with whom you can journey to Christ.

And to all of you who are married: Do not ever stop loving. Yes, there are days or occasions when your spouse is not at his or her best and there are days and occasions when you might not behave your best. But never give up on yourselves or on each other. Seek the sacrament of penance, confession, not just to have your sins forgiven but to strengthen your marriage. When I hear people confess that they have been selfish with their spouse, or that they have not been as understanding as they should have been, or that they spoke harsh words to their spouse, or any sin that might lead to a weakening of their marriage, I know they are really in a good marriage. They are putting up a fight with themselves to be in an even better marriage.

Today, as we remember the presence of the Lord at the wedding feast of Cana, we pray that all of our married couples may celebrate the Presence of Christ in the little churches that are their Catholic homes.