

**Second Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C  
(Jan. 18, 2004)**

Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue. You are familiar, I'm sure, with that old saying about what every bride should have at her wedding. Does it apply to the story you just heard about the Wedding Feast at Cana? Well, with a bit of imagination I think we can see a connection. Something old: the fact itself of a wedding. Already in the Bible throughout the Hebrew Scriptures we have read of weddings, people coming together with God's blessing to begin a new life and family. Something new: what Jesus does and what it means are something new. More about that in a minute. Something borrowed: the power of God manifested in Jesus to relieve the embarrassment of this newly married couple. Something blue: well, here we really have to use our imagination, and perhaps a bit of fancy as well: the Mother of Jesus was there and artists through the centuries have always pictured her dressed in a robe of blue.

Believe it or not, in spite of appearances to the contrary, the story you just heard is not really about a wedding. It's about Jesus: who he is and what he has come to do.

In the Old Testament banqueting, feasting is often a metaphor or symbol for the Messianic times. Beyond that it is a sign of the idyllic time when all people will be drawn together to God's holy mountain where they will live in peace and harmony, where there will be no more wars or training for wars. Swords will be turned into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. Instruments of war will become farming tools to produce life rather than death, and everyone will feast on an abundance of good food and fine wine.

Jesus, too, often used the image of a banquet to talk about the kingdom of God, even a wedding feast to symbolize the heavenly banquet to which all are invited. John the Evangelist tells us that Jesus performed this first sign at a wedding feast. At his mother's request he provided wine in abundance, fine wine, and in this way showed he was the promised Messiah, that in him the messianic times had begun. In the course of his Gospel John is going to give us seven signs, and those signs do what signs

always do, they point to something. In this case they point to the fact that Jesus is the Messiah promised by God, and more than the Messiah, he will be Son of God in a very special way. He will indeed himself be God.

Now, in spite of the fact that this story is really about Jesus rather than about a wedding, the wedding imagery is very important. In the Old Testament the union between husband and wife is often used as a symbol of the union between God and the people, and in the New Testament and in the Church's liturgy, that same union becomes symbolic of the union of Christ and his church. In the first reading we heard today God speaks through the prophet Isaiah and tells the people who have just returned from exile and who perhaps thought God had abandoned them, God tells them, "I have been faithful to my promises. I have not abandoned you. I will marry you and I will be your lover and you will be my bride and I will find my joy in you."

The significance of the marriage imagery has to do with union. Husband and wife come together in a union of love. Two become one, and from their loving embrace comes a family, a community. Jesus has come to create community, to bring together what had been divided, to heal the wounds of sin and division. This is the work of salvation and this is the meaning of the wedding feast.

As if to emphasize this message we hear Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians tell us that there are different gifts but the same Spirit; there are different ministries but the same God who accomplishes all of them in everyone. It is one and the same Spirit who produces all these gifts. In that same Chapter 12 he goes on to say that Christ is like a single body with its many limbs and organs, which, many as they are, together make up one body. For indeed we were all brought into one body by baptism, in the one spirit, whether we are Jews or Gentiles, slaves or free, and that one Holy Spirit was poured out for all to drink.

In the letter to the Galatians, he will say: there is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female; we are all one in Christ.

Today the Church begins a week of prayer for Christian unity. It seems to me particularly significant that we have these readings with this meaning on this particular day. The Body of Christ has been divided. What once was one has been split asunder. It has been dismembered. Jesus

prayed that all might be one, as you Father are in me, he said, and I in you. That they all may be one in us. But Jesus did not just pray about it. He did something about it too. He went about doing good, bringing people together, feeding the hungry, healing hurts and giving hope. In other words, creating community.

Surely one of the great tasks facing all of us is first of all to understand that we are one, not just as members of this parish, not just as part of the larger Catholic community, but we are one with all those who call themselves Christian. We have all been baptized in the same Spirit. Our task now is to reach out in whatever way we can to all our brothers and sisters in the Lord, whoever they are, wherever they may be and welcome them as part of our community.

This week of prayer for unity focuses on the Christian community, but I can't help but feel that we must think, too, of our Jewish brothers and sisters, and, given the circumstances of our nation today, also of our Muslim brothers and sisters. This may be particularly difficult because of misunderstandings due to differences in culture and the unfortunate stereotypes we see and hear. But an effort must be made. This is not an easy task, but surely it is a noble task with rich rewards when together we will all be able to sit down equally at the banquet, enjoying the abundant food and fine drink that the prophets tell about and that Jesus modeled for us at the wedding feast of Cana. Dear friends, it's worth the effort. And surely it is God's will.