

The Wedding at Cana

Despite the high numbers in divorce, weddings still are a moment of joy and celebration in our life. At the time of Jesus it was no different. For peasants and labourers, the wedding celebration was probably the highlight of an entire life. Too soon the daily hard routine would come back, and that feast would become a nice memory of a time of feasting celebrations.

But the wedding celebration was much more than this. It showed also how connected and wealthy the bridegroom's family was in the village.

The wedding feast lasted seven days. During those days plenty of food and wine were provided for local and foreign guests who travelled from afar to join the celebration. A shortage in food or wine would bring shame on the family, showing a lack of connection and wealth.

And this is exactly the scenario that we find in John's gospel. At this wedding, where Jesus, his mother and his disciples have been invited, the wine runs out.

Knowing the background, we can now understand why Mary is worried and why she turns to Jesus. Jesus' answer is a difficult one because it sounds like a rebuke towards his mum. Most commentaries agree though in saying that what we perceive as a harsh answer was not perceived as such at Jesus' time.

However, harsh or not harsh, Jesus' answer does not leave much hope for action. *"Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come."*

And yet, despite this answer, surprisingly, Mary says to the servants: "Do whatever he tells you".

You see, until that moment, Mary has been a mother talking with her son. When Mary turns to talk to the servants, a transformation takes place. She does not know what Jesus is going to do, but she knows that Jesus is the only hope for that feast. Mary trusts Jesus and this trust transforms her into a believer.

It is now that the real shift in the story happens. Jesus decides to take action and by giving instructions to the servants, he is not any more a common guest but he has become the host.

And so the jars are filled with water and Jesus transforms the water into wine. What started as a feast and could have ended as a lifetime event of shame is now rescued by Jesus' action. But when Jesus is involved, we know that his answers and actions go beyond human demands and expectations, reaching a deeper level of human being's existence.

If we reflect, to ask to fill jars with water when the wine has run out does not make a lot of sense. Yet the servants do what Jesus asks, without hesitation: somehow they recognise that whatever is going on is something out of the ordinary and maybe this is why they filled the jar up to the brim.

Jesus is not simply supplying a merchandise that has run out. What Jesus is offering is something superior in quality and quantity: By becoming the host, Jesus transforms a seven-days-feast, where wine runs out, into a never-ending feast where there is enough and in abundance for all.

Jesus here is offering a wine that is life-changing and that will quench the spiritual thirst, and in fact, later on in John's gospel, he will do something similar with the Samaritan woman at the well.

Wine in abundance is a symbol which is strictly connected with the messianic age: when the Messiah comes, the wine will flow liberally. So Jesus, the Messiah, by transforming the water into wine is offering us a redemptive transformation.

The story of the wedding of Cana is a story of joy because it highlights how ALL benefit from Jesus' action, those who know and those who do not know.

Apart from Mary, the disciples and the servants, no one seemed to know or acknowledge what really happened. Probably the majority of the guests did not even notice that the wine ran out. Maybe they noticed the time-gap in serving the wine, but since the second wine was superior in taste, they did not complain but kept on celebrating. Maybe that wedding will always be remembered as the wedding with the good wine and nothing more.

This is the gratuitousness of grace.

The gift that God has given us in Jesus Christ: while we are sitting at a table, Christ comes to the world, shows us the way, and through his death and resurrection he gives us freely God's forgiveness and God's salvation.

And so today, we are still sitting at the table of our life. For some it is a period of wedding-like joy, for some it is a period of transition, for some it is a period of pain and desperation.

I wonder, with whom in this story we identify ourselves? Who are we at the wedding in Cana? Are we the bride or the bridegroom? We are happy because a new stage of life has just started, we celebrate it with a great party that we label in our memory as THE party, and then go back to our daily life? Are we like the head waiter who has tasted and recognised something qualitatively superior, but, because this escapes the human logic he labelled it as not worthy to investigate? Are we like the servants? Who recognise Jesus' authority, saw the miracle, were ready to obey but not ready to follow him? Are we like the disciples and Mary, who trusted Jesus and followed him without really knowing where?

We go to a wedding invitation that we call church, we sit at its table, we share bread and wine, we live in a community. But we look around and we see fewer and fewer people, and maybe, like Mary we do worry.

We worry because we do care about this church, like the guests at Cana, people here have become part of our family. We worry because there is a relationship, a union that we want to keep on celebrating. And sometimes, in our Churches we have the feeling that the wine, the energy, the number of the members, all are running out.

Well, I guess the good news in the wedding of Cana is that the One we believe to be a guest is actually the host and if we are here it is because we have received an invitation.

Human strength, energy, visions can run out. Despite all our good plans and organisation, the wine will run out: It is the reality of our life.

Yet, in this broken and imperfect reality, God sends us an invitation to share through Jesus the pure gift of God's glory. This is a gift that is transformative, superior in quality, a gift that is abundant, a gift for everyone.

This is a gift that saves. Amen