

Homily: Second Sunday of Ordinary Time
(*Jn 2:1-11*)

We have just finished celebrating a whole of season of visions . . . manifestations . . . dreams, and now as the Church returns to the more quiet pace of ordinary time, we hear in the Gospel today of yet another vision. The visions we've had over Advent and Christmas have been of different kinds. Some have been of the sugar-plum variety: the first lighting of the tree, perhaps, after finally getting it all set up and decorated; the joy on children's faces as they first come downstairs on Christmas morning; the joy on your face when you wish the last of your guests a safe journey home. There have also been the visions of the Christmas story: the angel appearing to Mary; Joseph encountering the angel in a dream; and the great vision of the Epiphany: the Christ Child, a baby laid in a manger, whom shepherds and Magi saw for who he truly is: God with human flesh come to share our lives. Today's Gospel may seem like a great leap forward, with Jesus now a full grown man, but it, too, presents a vision, for it is the first time in John's Gospel when Christ reveals God's glory, and when we are told, "his disciples began to believe in him."

While the Gospel we hear over the Christmas season, the Gospel of Luke, presents us with a vision of Jesus as a newborn child,

leaving us free to embrace and believe in him, like the shepherds and the Magi, or to reject and deny him, like Herod; John presents us with somewhat different portrait of our Lord. Instead of the humble manger in Bethlehem, the scene is set at a wedding feast in the town of Cana. A wedding feast: a time and place set aside to celebrate love, where the hopes and dreams of the young are alive and fresh, and where the old are young again and renew their hopes in dreams from long ago, however the years have worked them out. A wedding is a time when the future seems limitless, for there are no bounds to the happiness we feel. We congratulate the couple and try to get some of their joy to rub off on us. We kiss the bride, even if we just met her a few minutes ago in the receiving line, and – as Holy Scripture puts it – the guests drink freely. It is square in the middle of just such an event, at once very ordinary and very extra-ordinary, that John tells us of Jesus performing his first miracle, revealing to his disciples, as he does to us, who he truly is.

By changing water into wine, however, Jesus is not offering his divine credentials to impress the wedding guests. Far more than that, he is showing how God wants to meet us in our lives. Notice Jesus doesn't lead his disciples out into the desert or up onto a mountaintop to let them in on this truth. Nor is it some hidden teaching, that if only we were holy enough or smart enough or dedicated enough, we would understand and everything

would become simple. Instead Jesus offers us, as he did his disciples, a vision of God in the ordinary cycle of human life, at a wedding party, with his mother, in the crisis of an embarrassed host. And the God Jesus reveals is one who desires for us lives marked by the same joy of a wedding feast: where love for him and one another gives us the confidence to hope for a better future, and where the joy of being with one another – like the wine – never runs out. That promise of a bright future, when the brokenness of our lives is healed and we are made new, was the message of Israel's Prophets, and it now becomes that of Jesus at the start of his ministry, his vision of the way God looks at us.

This is not the only way that we meet God, though. We also know that at the end of the Gospel Jesus reveals God's love through the Cross, which is certainly no wedding party. And so you may be thinking that my words this morning about love and joy are nice to listen to, but when you look at your life or at the world we live in, there may be precious little that reminds you of a wedding feast . . . and you would be right. And so you might ask what good is it to hear that what God wants for us is to live with the joy of a wedding, when what we see in ourselves, or around us, seems like many more funerals than marriages taking place. Shouldn't we be more realistic, and our faith more serious, more practical? Maybe we should, but I

fear we would lose something, for what makes us Christians is our believing in a vision – far more than our efforts at making good on it.

Tomorrow our nation celebrates the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., a man with a vision, a man whose faith in Christ formed his vision of himself and of our country. That vision allowed him to see not only what this country was but also – and far more importantly – what this country could become. And it was that second vision that gave him strength when all around him were those who were certain black and white could not live together as equals. The dream of a world where all could be free and live in peace was then what it is now: still a vision. Yet for Martin Luther King, it was a vision worth dying for. The Good News, God's wedding feast, revealed by Christ at Cana had (and has) similar consequences, yet for those who believe, it makes all the difference. Let us hold to that vision and see in this Eucharist feast a first glimpse of what lies in store: a place where all who share our faith in the Real Presence of Christ among us have a place at the table and where all are valued as guests of the Lord.