

Second Sunday after the Epiphany

January 16, 2022

**Homily for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass
of St. Thomas More Catholic Parish**

celebrated at

St. Joseph Catholic Church

116 Theodore Street

Scranton, PA 18508

John 2:1-11

The theme of today's Epistle is an excellent summary of the teaching of the Church with regard to marriage, even though that particular sacrament is not explicitly mentioned in chapter 12 of St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Essentially, the lifelong, faithful, and fruitful union between one man and one woman is a sign of the complementarity of gifts from God for the common good, which always issues in life. Precisely because we are different, yet complementary, as the gifts we have received are different and complementary, our various dispensations of grace work together that we may have life and have it abundantly.

Complementarity and cooperation, however, were not what characterized marriage in Jesus' own day, when he blessed marriage by his first miracle at Cana in Galilee. According to Roman Law the father of the family had power of life and death over females in his family. Not only was spousal abuse legal, but the infanticide of newborn girls was both legal and rampant. If a Roman father walked out of the birthing room after the delivery of any female or a boy with a birth defect, this was the sign to the midwife to drown the baby in the bucket of water that was present exactly for this purpose. The mother who had carried and borne her child had no say in the matter, and as a result few families had more than one girl. Murder became the means by which Roman fathers avoided paying the obligatory dowry, 15 to 20 years down the road.

Jewish custom did not permit infanticide, but the abandonment of one's spouse was common, as was adultery. Indeed, these two sins went hand-in-hand, since divorce reduced many women to prostitution as their means to survive; and many of their clients were the married men who would eventually abandon their wives, keeping the brutal cycle going. The Pharisees asking Jesus about the lawfulness of divorce and the story of the woman caught in the act of adultery in John, chapter 8, attest to both of those realities.

Needless to say, those abuses were not what Jesus blessed at Cana; nor would He bless the neo-pagan conception about marriage today: that it is a mere contract, the purpose of which is self-indulgence, until one of the parties seeks unilaterally to end said contract, thereby avoiding the responsibilities inherent to the contract, so that he or she may enter into a new contract with another witting or unwitting victim. That this so-called freedom to abandon one's spouse is tied up with our nation's abortion regime, premised also on a purported freedom, is undeniable; so we have today basically what was occurring in the Roman Empire two thousand years ago—spousal abuse, murder, and the abandonment of one's moral duties on a monumental and society-wide scale.

The changing of water into wine prefigures the transformation of marriage that Jesus undertook by reminding his listeners when they asked him about divorce, "*In the beginning it was not so.*" Marriage is

supposed to be free, indissoluble, and fruitful; and husband and wife are supposed to be faithful to each other. The poor wine that I described as the norm in AD 30 was served first, and the people were dissatisfied. Jesus serves the good wine, but it is only available to us if we obey the words of His Mother, *“Do whatever He tells you.”* Life will proceed from our unions only insofar as we have the complementarity that is inherent to marriage, while remaining as faithful to God as He has been to us.

Thus, the changing of the water into wine also represents the graces available to us, if we decide to embark on God’s vision for marriage from the beginning, from the Garden. Concessions from the ideal and abuse of the spouses crept in because the responsibilities of marriage are so great and difficult to live into. But under the new disposition of grace, received through the sacraments of the Church, one need not despair that he will be able to accomplish what is required of him. In fact, grace makes possible the impossible; and if our Lord was able to turn water into wine, He can certainly transform us, who are emissaries of death, into conduits of grace and vessels of life. The transformation of water into wine represents our transformation, again dependent upon our Blessed Mother’s admonition, *“Do whatever he tells you.”* God will not force His grace upon us. We must receive it.

And there is more than enough grace to go around. Just as the disciples gather up twelve baskets of broken pieces after the feeding of the five thousand, so there is so much wine at Cana that it could not possibly be drunk at a typical wedding. Jesus made the bride and groom, at a minimum, 2,500 glasses of wine and likely closer to 3,800 glasses of wine, in other words, an inexhaustible supply of the best wine imaginable. And this, of course, is not the food which perishes, but the bread of life and the cup of salvation which wells up to eternal life and issues in our salvation. Therefore, not only do the graces of marriage lead to children, human souls that are the result of the spouses cooperating with God’s grace; but also do the very graces imparted through marriage lead the spouses themselves to heaven. All this is represented in Jesus’ first miracle, which He freely chose to perform at a wedding, both to reclaim the institution He had inaugurated, and also to transform society by means of its proper observance and exercise. Marriage will work better for individual couples and the common good, if we *“Do whatever He tells [us].”*

Finally, we have in this miracle a prefigurement of Jesus’ last arrangement from the Cross. We recall that Jesus ended His earthly ministry by assigning John to Mary with the words *“Behold your mother.”* She is our mother because Jesus is our brother, so we have in her an advocate to whom we can appeal in our time of need. She will intercede for the faithful, just as she did at Cana, when Mary’s intercession became the impetus for our Lord’s first miracle, which began his public ministry. At Cana we begin to see what will be our relationship with Jesus and His mom. And she will tell us when we speak to her the same thing she told them, *“Do whatever he tells you.”*

Thus, she would tell us, and has told us, particularly at Fatima in 1917, that our societal implosion through which we are now living, is because of our reversion to disobedience. The return to order goes by way of Cana.