



**Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue
in the City of New York**

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www.SaintThomasChurch.org

Sunday, January 17, 2010
The Second Sunday after the Epiphany

Choral Eucharist
at 11am

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A Sermon by
The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, Rector
on
Saint John 2:1-11

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DOMESTIC DEPLETION

When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” And Jesus said to her, “O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” St. John 2:1-11

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The new widow was a Christian believer and had been a devout, sacramental church member ever since her Confirmation as a teenager. At the age of 19 she married her husband (who was 21) and over the decades they became a matriarch and a patriarch with four children, a dozen grandchildren and to date six great grandchildren. She had always had many friends and neighbors dropping by. They had always entertained animals of several species, in and outside the house. Now at 82 she was alone for the first time in her life, with reminders of her husband of 63 years everywhere she turned. She had infirmities to contend with, and she was now struggling through the first year of a widow’s milestones: the first Thanksgiving since his death, their wedding anniversary, Christmas and New Year; and now came the nearly 30th anniversary of the death of her oldest child, their son, carried off in a night from his own young wife and children by an aortic aneurism.

It turned out to be a hard day, that recent anniversary of her son’s death. She had a cold. A phone call informed her that an old friend had throat cancer. When she hung up the phone, she noticed that her little tropical fish – a gift given to her husband by their daughter in his last days – was floating dead in the fishbowl. She went to bed.

There are several details to note in today’s reading of Saint John’s Gospel story of Christ’s changing water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. Not the least is the role of Jesus’ Mother. She and Jesus and Jesus’ disciples were guests at the wedding. Cana is in the hill country near Nazareth, their hometown. Wine, like bread, was a staple of life. Wedding feasts could not go on without it. For the wine to give out was a serious embarrassment for the families. Mary interceded; she went to her Son: “They have no wine.”

Jesus’ response has perplexed, down through the ages. “Woman, what have you to do with me; my hour has not yet come.” These words are quietly formal and stern; yet they

are not rude or petulant. I believe our Lord is telling his mother that this immediate concern, important as it may be, is not part of his short life's "hour," which is his sacrificial mission and death – something he always foresaw.

Nevertheless (!), Mary persists in her intercession, and she tells the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Believers in the Mother of God's heavenly intercession will see its first earthly instance right here. Christ acts. The drama is understated, but the miracle is awesome. There were six stone water pots each with a capacity of twenty to thirty gallons. "Fill the jars with water," said Christ. They filled them to the brim. "Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast." The steward, unaware of what had happened (only Mary, the servants, and Jesus' disciples seemed to know), compliments the hosts for an unusual grace-note: Hosts normally served the best wine first; then, when people had drunk freely, they would serve the poorer wine. But at Cana they had kept the good wine till the end! This, the first of Jesus' signs in Saint John's Gospel, was an epiphany, a manifestation of Christ's glory, and his disciples believed in him.

This story is referenced in the Book of Common Prayer's exhortation at the beginning of the rite of Holy Matrimony. Matrimony, says the old English Prayer Book, "is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence, and first miracle that he wrought, in Cana of Galilee." When I am preparing couples for the rite of marriage, and often at the wedding itself, I say, Wasn't it a good thing that Jesus and the Church (that is, Mary and the disciples) were included in that wedding? If they hadn't been there, the wine, and perhaps much more, would have given out.

You can run out of a lot of things in a marriage, in a family, in a friendship, in home life of any kind. Domestic depletion includes losses in health, affection, finances, status, setbacks of all kinds; it includes deaths in the family. These losses often cry out for nothing less than miracles, nothing less than changing water into wine.

Mary's intercession with her Son resulted in his mighty action, a demonstration of divine power manifesting that the Word, by whom all things were made, was made flesh, incarnate, in the Person of Jesus. But Jesus had warned his Mother that he had another, more primary concern; namely his hour, which had not yet come. When the Lord was an infant, at his Presentation in the Temple, an old saint had warned Mary that her son's life would involve a sword which would pierce her soul. (Lk 2:22-40) Now, at the beginning of his public manifestation and ministry, that sword could be felt in her Son's own words, the mention of his hour. The hour would come within God's definite providence. "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." Jesus said this to show by what death he was to die. Good Friday afternoon: this was his hour.

The new widow was walking through the valley of the shadow of death. But just as there were reminders, everywhere she looked, of her beloved husband; so also, if she saw them, were other reminders. There was the little crucifix he had asked for near the end, and her cross which had two wedding rings on it. A Bible and Prayer Book were on the bookshelf. On the kitchen counter, near the fishbowl, was a leaflet from last Sunday's Eucharist. Christ would enfold her grief into his own, her hour into his hour. She could rediscover that as she walked through that valley of the shadow of death, the Lord was with her, with his rod and staff to comfort her, even preparing his table before her in the presence of the things that troubled her. These things might send her to bed, but she would most certainly rise again with Christ. It was good that she had included Jesus in her life, and in her wedding invitation, so long ago.

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.