

Epiphany 2 Year C 2019

Weddings for me are more often than not a matter of professional interest – obtaining licences, organising the details of the wedding service and so on. But, in August one of our sons is getting married and for the first time I have been caught up, in a more personal way, with the excitement of a bride and groom as they think about where they want the service and the reception; what everyone will wear; who the best men and bridesmaids might be; and who they want to be invited. And all that underlines an obvious truth that a wedding is all about the bride and groom, about their hopes and wishes. Except, that is, at the wedding in Cana of Galilee that we heard about in the gospel just now. As an account of a wedding it is very strange – the bride and groom are not mentioned once. There is not even a cameo appearance. So while this account may superficially be about a village wedding deep down other things are going on. And among the layers of meaning in this rich text one of the things it is about is following Jesus; about discipleship.

And we glean this from the outset when it starts by saying: “On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee”. The mention of the “third day” refers back to a series of incidents that happened on the two previous days and involved the calling of the disciples Andrew and Peter, Philip and Nathaniel. And this is reinforced by the mention of Galilee. In all the gospels Galilee is the region where Jesus began his ministry and called his first disciples. So the scene is set for a further narrative about discipleship on the third day.

And then we hear this: “The mother of Jesus was there”. Mary is never mentioned by name in the fourth gospel but always placed in terms of her relationship with Jesus. And one of the reasons for this is that she is the model, the archetypal disciple of Jesus. And we see this from what follows. When the wine runs out and the wedding, which would have lasted for days, was in danger of falling apart Mary does not fret and worry. She brings it all to the Lord. She fixes her eyes on Jesus. And that is the model for all disciples. “Take it to the Lord in prayer”. And although Jesus displays some reluctance

to reveal his power she simply says to the servants: “Do whatever he tells you.” It is an extraordinary response of unhesitating trust. She has complete faith in the dependability of her Son – in his ability to transform a situation, to bring riches out of poverty. And by her response Mary becomes an agent of Jesus; a go-between who enables the servants to become part of the Lord’s work making new what was failing.

In the First Letter to the Corinthians St. Paul identifies this capacity for cooperation by using the daring term “fellow-workers” with God (1 Cor. 3: 9). It is a description that bestows on human beings a dignity that is very striking. In fact, it is the one of the glories of humanity that we are considered worthy to be co-workers with God. And in today’s epistle we learn how God equips us to be his fellow-workers by bestowing gifts upon us. The catalogue of gifts is noticeable for its diversity –the utterance of wisdom, the working of miracles, the gift of prophecy and the quest for social justice. And since New Testament times the church has displayed further gifts relating to the arts. And by happy coincidence later in this Eucharist we

will admit Will as a full chorister recognizing his gift for singing as a gift of the Spirit.

And this rich diversity of gifts is no accident; for the range of different gifts reflects the character of the giver. St. Paul uses three different words to identify the source of gifts. He talks about the Spirit, about the Lord and about God so, perhaps unconsciously, presenting us with a Trinitarian diversity within God himself. But, since we live in an age when diversity is not always welcome we also need to notice the way that gifts are given for one unifying purpose; for the common good. And we could use a musical analogy here to make the point. Will is going to be made a full chorister but he will use his gift in conjunction with other musicians to produce music for a common purpose. Music is made so that all who hear it may be drawn by beauty to a vision of the glory of God. Musical gifts are given to individuals to enrich the hearts and lives of all.

But, what of the rest of us; where are we being called to exercise our gifts for the common good? In my last parish we

undertook a millennium project which involved commissioning a window etched by Simon Whistler. At the heart of the window was a text from today's Psalm: "With you is the well of life". It is a very beautiful window which speaks not only of the glory of God but of the generosity of God who is the source of diverse gifts and who can provide extravagantly when resources dry up as at Cana in Galilee. But, the window was only one part of the project. Alongside that we raised money to provide four actual wells in Malawi, one of the poorest nations on the planet, which were located in places where people lacked the basic resource of fresh water. This was one way we felt we could both honour God and take seriously the calling to be fellow-workers with him. One of the seductive things about that project, though, was that it stopped one feeling quite so powerless about a human situation of need.

And yet it was precisely the powerlessness of Mary at the wedding in Cana that led her to fix her eyes on Jesus as the dependable presence – to seek the only one who could help when human resources ran dry. And over the past week I

have had numerous conversations with people who express the same sense of helplessness about the political state of our nation following the debate on the European Withdrawal bill. Political resources seem to have dried up and there is a disturbing sense of political vacuum.

St. John of the Cross, one of the great saints of the church, suggested that when our understanding of a situation leaves us helpless and bewildered, with all the familiar signposts and landmarks taken away, then we are being called to move on and exercise the gift of faith. Like Mary we are to fix our eyes on Jesus and bring our sense of helplessness and the apparent lack of political resources to the Lord. This is part of our calling as disciples of Jesus and we are to do it for the common good remembering in this Epiphany season that Jesus was born to be a light to the nations. So can I encourage you, whether it is your normal practice or not, to pray each day for our politicians and for our nation having faith that with God is the well of life and in Jesus he shows his power to make new what has failed.