

Reflection for 24th January (Epiphany 3) John 2:1-11

We're already three weeks into the new year, and already we've probably forgotten any new year resolutions we may have made, so today would probably be a good time to start again. In our gospel reading today, Jesus blesses a simple country wedding with his presence, performs his first sign, and reveals his glory – it's a new beginning.

We have moved on a long way from Christmas. The helpless infant we saw then in his mother's arms is now telling her firmly how things stand: his hour has not yet come. A time will come when he will give wine a meaning that it will never lose, but for now it is just wine. Wine has always been associated with weddings. Water, on the other hand, is not always drinkable.

On the occasion described in our gospel reading, it was not drinking water that was available but water for washing, in big thirty-gallon jars. You normally bathed in it to make yourself ritually clean before a ceremony. Jesus was often involved in controversy about purification rituals: he was not opposed to hygiene, but to the obsessive cleansing that went with fearful law-keeping. At the wedding in Cana he performed his first sign, which demonstrated to those who understood it that his arrival did away with all that ritual purifying, all those efforts to wipe away our own sin.

We are still in the season of Epiphany, a season of good news which starts with the coming of the wise men, and moves on to the baptism of Jesus and the turning of water into wine. We are also in the annual week of prayer for Christian unity, which reminds us that it takes all kinds of Christians to make up one body.

There are different gifts, different kinds of service, but the same God is active in every one of us. God made us all different, and gave us different gifts – and we are to use the ones we have been given. One can sing, one can speak, one can comfort, one can advise, one can lead prayer, one can listen; one can do church work, one can do secular work, one can do housework; one can encourage, one can plan, one can preach, one can play music, one can greet, and so on. St Paul says "In each of us the Spirit is seen to be at work for some useful purpose." Can the Holy Spirit be seen to be at work in you, or in me, for some useful purpose? God works in all of us in a particular way, and it is our responsibility to find out what that way is.

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