

Sunday 2. c 19

What is the context in which we hear these readings this evening? I suppose it differs for each of us, for we all have individual contexts made up of what is important in our individual lives at this moment. But of course we all share some common contexts as well. The first one that comes to my mind is the national shutdown which is imposing impossible burdens on many of our fellow citizens who work for the government. They are not receiving their paychecks, and since many, if not most, people live from paycheck to paycheck, that is a harrowing situation, indeed so harrowing that Cardinal O'Malley issued a statement on Friday calling for our government officials to bring this situation to an end, but to do so not by using immigrant families as a pawn in the negotiations. The present shutdown, he claims, is an injustice and should be recognized as such. It violates the social contract which exists in a well-ordered society between the government and those who work for it. This shutdown may qualify as perhaps the most important problem in our national context, but of course it touches some of us more immediately than others. Yet we all can and should be attune to it because in one way or another it affects all of us.

More narrowly in our own Catholic context we pray this coming week for Christian unity. This effort began with two Episcopalians, a Lewis Wattson and a Ms. Lurana White, in the 1890s. They wanted to live in a Franciscan way and even wanted their church to recognize the leadership of the pope. Eventually they became Catholics and as such continued their efforts to foster unity between the Catholic and Episcopal churches. We have come a long way since then, especially because of Vatican II. Perhaps the current crisis in our Catholic Church can help us in this effort. If in the past we have suffered from a superiority complex as Catholics, the humiliations we are now undergoing may help us to take our fellow Christian churches more seriously. In that context we can also keep in mind the meeting to be held in February in Rome. The pope has called the bishops of the church together to deal with the present crisis in the priesthood and among the bishops themselves because of their failure to remove offending priests. May this coming meeting help our church to purify itself and to move forward.

Into these mostly discouraging contexts our readings for today come with a blast of good news. It is the second Sunday of our new liturgical year. Last Sunday we witnessed the baptism of the Lord, which marked the beginning of his public life. Today we see

Jesus attend a marriage and perform a miracle at the instigation of his mother, one which will save the young couple the embarrassment of not having any wine to offer their guests to drink. They have misjudged their guests' capacities. All the wine is gone. Jesus' mother and Jesus himself and his disciples are guests. Jesus' mother—so she is named—notices the situation and says to his son: "They have no wine." Once again, as when he was 12, his answer is off-putting. Then, as a 12 year-old, when his parents found him in the temple after looking for him for three days and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety," he answered her by saying, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" Here he says to her: "Woman, how does your concern affect me?" What kind of son is this?

We could make a joke of this. We could interpret his answer to mean that he and his buddies have already had enough wine. "No problem for us, Mam. Is it a problem for you?" But of course that is not only irreverent, but ignorant. Here, as in the other scene a theological point is being made. Jesus is not your ordinary lad or young man. He is a man on a mission, and the mission is to do his Father's will, and nothing takes precedence over that. And so here his answer to her is: "My hour has not yet come." However, in

both scenes he is brought back into greater normality. At 12, after that remark about being in his Father's house, he returns with his parents to Nazareth and is obedient to them. And here, having made his point that his time to reveal himself is still in the future, he must have given her some hint that he is not entirely closed to her request, for she now says to the servers: "Do whatever he tells you." In other words, she knows he will attend to the situation. And he does. The result is that six stone jars, each holding about twenty-four gallons, are now full of wine that should have been served first because it is so good.

In our first reading this evening the prophet Isaiah is telling his fellow Jews that their nation is going to be raised on high once again. "No more shall people call you 'forsaken' or 'desolate,' but you shall be called 'my delight.'" Then Isaiah reaches for the marriage bond to describe God's relationship with Israel: "As a young man marries a virgin, your Builder shall marry you; and as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so shall your God rejoice in you."

If you look at the beginning of John's Gospel you will see that John imagines this wedding scene as the seventh day of a new creation, a recreation, of the world. He begins his Gospel with the same words used at the beginning of the first book of the Bible,

Genesis: “In the beginning. . . .” What does that tell us? It tells us that John believes that with the coming of Jesus God is recreating the world. This is a new beginning. Genesis talks about six days of creation and then the seventh day, the day on which God rests after completing his creative work. John does the same thing in his Gospel. You can see that if you read his first chapter. He keeps repeating the words: “the next day, the next day, the next day. . . .” Then, at the beginning of the second chapter, he says: “On the third day. . . .” Since he has already named four days, this third day after them is actually the seventh day, and this is the day on which the marriage feast in Cana takes place. Thus this marriage feast represents for John the completion of the new creation. Here Jesus is revealed in his glory for the first time, and his disciples begin to believe in him. This is Jesus’ first miracle, or what John calls his first sign, the first of seven signs which Jesus will perform in this Gospel.

How wonderful that we are being told that God loves us so much as to marry us and give us a wonderful wedding feast at which the wine flows abundantly. Jesus, the bridegroom, is here with us and makes sure that we have enough wine.