

## **The Second Sunday after Epiphany, A ✠ D 2010**

### **John 2:1-11, Ephesians 5:22-33**

*In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

1       Imagine a beautiful church. Its steeple soars seemingly into the clouds. Inside, the architecture matches. Dramatic pillars, a razor-like roof line, and steeply ascending rafters draw your eyes up into the lofty ceiling. Below, the floors are expansive stone, helping the sound resonate quite literally from the floor to the ceiling. The altar is ornate stone work, inlaid with beautiful gold, confessing silently and beautifully what the people who gather here believe their Lord gives them on this altar: His true Flesh and Blood. Behind the altar is a huge stained glass window. All around the perimeter are the eleven apostles and St. Paul. At the top of the window is an icon for God the Father; at the bottom is a dove representing the Holy Spirit. The majority of the window is a huge depiction of Jesus hanging dying on the cross. As the sun rises and catches the multi-faceted red stones, laid into the bloody wounds of Christ, the crimson flood almost sparkles. The window makes it quite difficult to give your undivided attention to the preacher, but that doesn't matter much, as both the pulpit and the window are preaching the same Christ crucified.

2       Now imagine the parishioners arrived one Sunday morning to see shards of colored glass littering the chancel, cascading from the altar, pouring down the stone steps into the sanctuary. Eyes that usually ascend naturally from the altar to the window in reverential awe now retrace that path with sickening anxiety. Their fears are confirmed. The beautiful window has been smashed by vandals. The magnificent picture of Jesus has been desecrated. The church is fictional, but the story is not. The window would be a man-made depiction of Christ, and its desecration would be a blasphemous travesty. How much worse would it be, though, if the picture of Christ were divinely created before being desecrated by vandals?

3       Marriage is good. It is God's creation. From the moment in the Garden of Eden when the Creator declared, "it is not good for man to be alone," God displayed His reason for creating mankind in the first place. God is love. And love is not abstract. It is a transitive verb, a verb with an object. God created mankind in order to love humanity. It is not good for man to be alone. With a creator who loves him, he is not. The mystery is profound, says St. Paul, and I am

saying that it refers to Christ and the Church. In marriage, you have a living picture of the relationship between Christ and His church, a holy icon composed not of paint and wood, or glass and solder, but of husband and wife.

4 It is not by accident that Jesus performed His first miracle, the first sign that evoked belief from His disciples, at a wedding. He is the Groom. His church is the bride. Why did God give Eve to Adam to share his life with her, his love with her, his own self with her? Because that is how God loves His creation. Jesus came to redeem His bride, to buy her back from her sin, to purify her for Himself. He came to give her His love, His life, Himself.

5 But since Adam and Eve rebelled against their creator, this holy icon of marriage, the picture of the relationship between Christ and His church, has been marred, tarnished, shattered. Even though what gets most Christians up in arms is the idea of state-approved homosexual marriage, that is not what most defiles God's institution of marriage, nor is it the root of the problem. If the only thing that triggers a defense of marriage from the Christian Church is the threat of homosexual marriage, she is too late and the window is shattered. Nor is the root of the problem that divorce is just as prevalent among Christians as among non-Christians. The problem is not that so many Christians want to have the appearance of marriage without God's blessing of their union. The problem is not that God's people prefer to turn a blind eye toward their children shacking up, their parents divorcing, their own infidelities. The problem is not that there is little difference in the amount of pornography viewed by Christians or non-Christians, or that Christian women consume romance novels just as voraciously as women outside the church. All of these are sinful, but they are merely symptoms. The core of the problem is deeper still. These things are abhorrent not merely because they are contrary to God's will but also because they expose your idolatry. Let your eyes trace the path from the shards of glass up to the shattered window. This is the problem: you want to be your own god. Repent. Every selfish thought exposes the fragility of this image.

6 That's the core of the problem: selfishness, self-idolatry. Husbands, God has not given you a wife so that she might make you happy and satisfied but so that you might love her, that you might care more about her happiness and satisfaction than your own, and so that you might learn how Christ has laid down His life for you. That's why masturbation is abhorrent:

those hands are given to you to care for your wife or your future wife, and you would use them to worship yourself. Wives, God has not given you a husband so that he might meet your needs but so that you might meet his, and so that in your submission to him you might learn how the Church submits lovingly to Christ. That's why women's ordination is unconscionable: women may have the ability to be pastors but not the authority. Those unmarried, God still uses those around you as living icons of the marriage between Christ and His church, and He uses you to defend their marriages. That's why any sex outside marriage is sinful: it is pure selfishness, desiring the pleasures of marriage without the commitment.

7 There is only one perfect marriage. There is only one Husband who loves His bride enough to live His life for her constantly, to love her continuously, to give Himself to her completely. She was nothing to be desired, but He desired her. She was neither faithful nor pure, but He came for her. She lusted after other gods, but He came to be her Lord. She pursued her own selfish interests, thinking she could live without her Groom, but He pursued her and her alone. This mystery is profound, but it refers to Christ and His church. Christ loved His betrothed so much that He gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. The symbol of this marriage is not a ring, but the holy cross is the sign and seal of this Groom's endless love for His bride.

8 You are in the perfect marriage. You are a part of Christ's holy, spotless bride. He washed you in the water and Word of Holy Baptism. She wears pure white at her wedding because she is pure. She wears the brilliant white of His righteousness. She has no sin, no stain, no impurity, no trace of her former adulteries because He has taken them away. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate. He keeps you in His bride, the church, through His ongoing forgiveness of sins in Holy Absolution. He whose first miracle was to change water into choice wine at a wedding banquet gives you a foretaste of His eternal wedding banquet even today. Here, he uses ordinary wine to be the means through which He delivers the finest vintage: His holy Blood.

9        Being in this perfect, unspoilable marriage gives your own marriage hope. You are not a good husband, but Jesus is. He never divorces His bride, never cheats on her, never seeks His own good. You are not a good wife, but the church is. She never divorces her Groom, never cheats on Him, never tries to usurp His headship because she trusts that He does everything for her good. You may learn from this Husband and this wife to be more faithful spouses. But you are already in the perfect marriage. And your marriages are likewise made perfect, not by your work but by His: the forgiveness of sins. Husbands are forgiven and set free. Wives are forgiven and set free. Those hoping someday to be married are forgiven and set free. Those who have allowed others to vandalize the icon of Christ and His church as well as those who have vandalized that icon are forgiven and set free. These living icons of Christ and His church are beautiful and spotless, perfect images like a restored stained glass window, because that which they represent is beautiful and holy.

*In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

Pastor Jeff Hemmer

Hope, Jerseyville