

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany, A ✕ D 2011

John 2:1-11

In the Name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

1 Marriage is hard work. Couples spend exorbitant amounts of time, energy, and money planning a wedding, but after the wedding day has passed, they believe the workload has dissipated, and all the hard work is behind them. Wrong. They're not unlike children who pour themselves into their pre-confirmation studies, but who, having been confirmed, believe the hard work is over and the workload is lessened. Wrong. The hard work always lies ahead. Tomorrow is usually more difficult than today. Every bit of growth leads to more realization of how much more growing and maturing you have to do. Every new day as a married couple presents new and greater challenges.

2 Despite reports that 40% of people believe marriage is obsolete and 44% of those under 30 think marriage will eventually be a forgotten institution, Jesus performed His first miracle at a wedding. Marriage is and remains God's good creation, His good gift to mankind. In the Garden of Eden, before God declared everything "very good" at the end of His active work of creating, at the end of the sixth day, he interrupted that day to declare one thing "not good." It is not good for man to be alone. So from a piece of Adam's side, a part of his own flesh, God made for him someone to love, someone to live for. And now, as the first display of His divinity, Jesus goes to a wedding and saves a bridegroom from the embarrassment of running out of wine. This, the first of His miracles, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee, and His disciples believed in Him. His miracles demonstrate that He is God, the eternal Son of God. His first miracle displays that He is the Creator, through whom Adam received His Eve.

3 So why is your tendency to take this good gift from God, the choice wine of marriage, and settle instead for simpler, blander water? Why did the number of cohabitating couples, those settling for water instead of the wine of God-ordained marriage, jump 13%% from 2009 to 2010? Why are even vows made at an altar and blessed by God still made half-heartedly, with both man and woman knowing that they certainly don't mean "until death parts us"? Why is the rate of divorce no different inside the Church or outside it? Why has the sacred vintage of sex within marriage replaced with the water of sex apart from marriage? Why do Christian couples avoid the God-given gift of fertility, medicating against it as if it were a disease and not a blessing, or holding a part of themselves back in the act of love-making, shielding themselves with pieces of rubber, plastic, or injected hormones? Why is the delicate wine of a wife's body replaced with the water of Photoshopped images of women whose sultry looks hide the fact that they don't care about you even a little. Why are large mainline denominations and many pew-sitters in traditional Church bodies giving up the wine of marriage between one man and one woman for the water of lust between two people, regardless of their gender? Why are girls and young women alike trading the wine of saving themselves for a man who has already committed to have and hold them for life for the water of using their bodies as tools to get boys to like them and stay with them just a little bit longer? Repent. God wants to give you wine. Quit settling for water.

3 It's not that God is an overbearing jerk who wants to keep you from having quite as much fun as you'd prefer. It's that He's your Creator and has given you the Sixth Commandment to protect His precious gift of marriage. It's that He knows better than you do what makes for successful marriages, good sex, and happy families. It's not that the Church is some sort of prudish Aunt Polly with her hopelessly outdated morality. It's that she's the Bride of Christ, the steward of the precious Word of God. It's that she is called to call you up higher, away from the false gifts, away from fake marriage, to a wine like nothing you've ever tasted, to gifts more precious than you can comprehend.

4 Marriage is a holy estate, a God-given calling. Wives are called to submit to their husbands as the Church submits to Christ, trusting that he loves her as her head, providing for her best interests. Husbands are called to love their wives as Christ loves His Church, laying down their lives, their needs, their desires, for the good of their wives and children, caring only for the good of their wives and not for their own. In other words, wives are called to do what seems impossible. And husbands are called to do what seems impossible. Marriage is a holy estate, a God-given calling, and it's hard work. But it's not chiefly your work.

5 What God has joined together, let not man separate. It is God who joins two into one, and God who keeps two as one. If Jesus can create a perfect marriage with His bride the Church, if He can redeem her, make her spotless and pure, having washed her in Holy Baptism, if He can make that marriage work, He can make your marriage work. If He can take a bunch of jerks and hypocrites, losers and liars, sinners dead in their transgressions, and give them new life, joining them into the one Body of His Church, then he can preserve a marriage between a jerk husband and a wicked wife. He does so with forgiveness.

6 The strength to live in the community of marriage and the household of family does not come from inside you. It comes from outside you. Two sinners made saints in the waters of Holy Baptism are set free from their sins to live forgiven lives toward one another. Two Christians who return from Holy Absolution having had the forgiveness of Jesus pronounced unto them are set free from bearing grudges and dwelling on past hurts; they're set free to forgive as they've been forgiven. Two children of God who could never on their own live under the same roof, having been fed with the Body and Blood of Jesus at the same altar are recreated and enabled to love one another fervently as they have been loved by their Lord fervently. Even those not a part of an earthly marriage are given a heavenly marriage, being joined into the Bride of Christ, and given strength to live chaste lives by the same Word and Sacraments that enable those married to live holy, forgiven lives toward each other.

7 Despite your tendency to make water from wine, to take the good gift and reduce it to mundane mediocrity, your Lord is still He who made wine from water. His work of redemption is to take a spoiled creation and to recreate it, to take dead sinners and give them new life, to take water and make choice wine. Having taken the world's sin, He takes the sinner's place, the cross. There, Jesus does what all His miraculous signs pointed toward: He makes life from death, specifically your life from His death.

8 Jesus makes wine from water, and not just wine, but choice wine, the finest vintage, the kind that even your dulled, drunken, overindulged taste buds can enjoy. His gifts are always better than you expect, more perfect than you can imagine. What seems like just a three-fold

splash of water turns out to be the wellspring of life; what seems to be the words of a man turn out to be the words of Christ for you; what seems to be mere bread turns out to be the Bread of Life; what seems only to be a sip of wine turns out to be the Blood shed to buy your release from sin and death. Jesus has crushed the grapes of the wrath of God, drank the full cup of God's wrath, and produced an even finer vintage, a cup brimming not with choice wine, but with the precious Blood of Jesus, shed to forgive your sins. From water wine, now from wine Blood.

9 The Christian life is hard work. No amount of work or effort on your part can make you a Christian. God does that, delivering to you His gift of faith, adopting you in Holy Baptism, giving you new life. But now that you're here, there's work to be done. There are works of mercy toward your neighbor, acts of sacrifice toward your family, Christian love to be shown toward your enemies, sinful flesh to resist and discipline, good works of every sort. But the strength and ability to live this life that has been given to you does not come from you, either. In the same way God delivered faith and forgiveness, He keeps you in that faith and strengthens you to do the works He has prepared in advance for you to do.

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