

SECOND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME C (2019)

THE MARRIAGE FEAST OF CANA (JN 2:1-12)

Introduction

Today we are praying especially for peace. And peace figures very powerfully in St. John's Gospel, not least in today's reading from the Marriage Feast of Cana. In Israel the family is at the heart of social life. And in that context Jesus made his first public appearance. It is not accentuated as a marriage for its own sake, though it reflects for believing Jews that Israel was in a marriage relationship with God. This is a regular biblical image of the covenantal relationship with the chosen people. The family is the home of love, affection, fidelity and commitment. Jesus was invited, and his mother may well have been a relative there through family ties, hence her being able to ask the servants to do whatever her Son wanted. The text does not say what she expected him to do. In those days the marriage celebrations lasted a whole week. It is speculated that if the disciples with Jesus did not bring the expected gifts for the wedding to cover the overall costs of the event, there followed the embarrassment with a lack of wine. Of course the whole scene is very symbolic. The New Covenant is inaugurated; the messianic times have arrived. Hence the superabundance of wine- the origin of which was known only to the servers. Its profound meaning was reserved for the disciples who were participants, not just at a family feast, but were witnesses of the glory of their Master. This is a picture of the most unique wedding in the history of the world. There is a scene of great peace and great promise. That is what people getting married would have longed for most. One is not allowed by the author of the Fourth Gospel to forget that the glory of Jesus was ultimately his triumph of obedience on the cross. The Gospel is a parable expressive of the loving obedience realised in the persistent fidelity of the Son of God as the way, the truth and the life (14:6).

St Paul (I Cor 12:4-11)

The second reading at today's Mass from St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians offers a picture of the way peace comes about. It extols the harmony achieved by people sharing their gifts in the Christian community. The death of individualism contributes to the good of all. Nobody is superior. Not surprisingly the Christian community is often described in the New Testament as the family of God. All the members of the family should rejoice in the success of all. The individual belongs to the family and contributes to gift sharing that benefits every other member, often called brothers and sisters. That one should ever speak of a black sheep in the family only shows that the exception proves the rule. Too often unhappily it is so. Paul's exhortation to his beloved Philippians 4:4ff. spells out the way to peace: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think on these things. Whatever you have learned and received and heard from me, and seen in me, put these things into practice. And the God of peace will be with you." The style matches the sentiment. There is something of rapture here. The whole world with its endowments of culture and beauty and achievement and the effects they have for happiness, these are celebrated here. Paul is no miserable stranger and exile in a fallen world that is always militating against God. These are lines written by a man who said that "For me to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21). If our relationships with others can reflect that then our love is not exclusive but a gift for all. It reflects the mind and heart of Christ Jesus.

Peace Between the Christian Communities

This week we also begin the annual prayer for Christian unity. It is five hundred years since the Lutheran protest that led to the awful divisions that set off Christians from Christians

ever since. Pope Francis intends to be a leader with those striving for peace between the Christian communities and other religions. Peace among religions is a major factor in the peace of the world, as we have been reminded of by the interreligious meetings that took place in Assisi, and which the pope is now following up with a visit to a country in the Arab world which is willing to receive him. It is a phenomenon of singular importance and remarkable that in the ongoing divisions in Great Britain due to leaving the European Union hardly any reference is made by anyone to the Christian faith that has been foundational in European life for centuries. Rarely do we hear or see a clerical spokesperson invited to give an opinion on what is of maximal importance for all, and in hoping to find a peaceful and honourable outcome conducive to the good of all. This silence could give the impression that religious faith is a purely private affair of no importance in furthering human aspirations at the political and social level. However, the two most recent archbishops of Canterbury have spoken helpfully on the issue. This Sunday, all over the world, all Christians are praying for peace, observing the Prayer Sunday for Peace.

Conclusion

Peace in one's own heart, peace in the family, peace in the community, peace in society, peace among nations- Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God (Mt 5:9). These are the concerns of our prayers today. And later during the Mass we will offer each other the sign of peace and mean it.

A happy Sunday to you all. Amen.

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