



Jan. 20, 2019 - Let's Make Wine Given by Rev. Mattei

In my wine preferences, I am surely and unashamedly biased: I like Italian wine. I know what region a certain bottle of wine comes from, its flavor and consistency, its food combinations, and cost range. It takes trained craftsmanship to make good wine, but the mineral composition of the soil, the proper amount of water, the elevation and inclination of the vineyard to the exposition to the sun, are fundamental. Good food, good wine and good company make for a successful party.

Today's gospel ([Jn 2:1-11](#)) presents us with the story of a wedding party that could potentially develop into a disastrous drama. The hosts run out of wine and before it becomes public embarrassment, Jesus saves the day not without prompting from his mother. Running out of food or wine at an important banquet is a serious problem. The inability to provide what the guests needed was a failure in hospitality that would bring shame on the wedding hosts. Mary seems to be the first guest to notice. She takes that concern upon herself and shares it with Jesus. She probably doesn't want for the wedding hosts to become the talk of the village for months or even years, and for the couple to begin their life together with a seriously damaging argument.

Jesus seems reluctant to intervene and to provide a sensitive way out to the hosts at first, but after a rhetorical question to his mother, whom he calls by the strange appellative of "woman," and noticing that his "hour has not yet come," his presence is felt and the glory of God manifested: water is miraculously transformed into wine, the first of Jesus' signs and the beginning of his public ministry. This is the first of two scenes where Mary is present in the gospel of John. The second is at the foot of the cross where she is addressed by the same common noun, "woman" ([Jn 19:26](#)). There, she is entrusted "maternity" over the beloved disciple, who has engaged in faithful discipleship: she becomes mother of the true Church and from then on, the Church takes her in ([Jn 19:27](#)). So the term "woman" is not a show of disrespect but a reference to an intertwined reality where the "hour of Jesus" introduces the "hour of the Church." Jesus' hour, which has not yet arrived, is dependent on the hour of the Church and can be manifested only when the Church has been prepared and made ready to carry on the ministry of Jesus. This wedding happens "three days" after Jesus calls his disciples and reveals to Nathanael that those who follow him "will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." ([Jn 1:51](#)).

Jesus' question about what concern it is to Mary (the Church) and to him ([Jn 2:4](#)) that they are out of wine is a rhetorical question that communicates compassion and spiritual involvement. The miracle of the water made wine is the first "sign" that reveals how the theoretical Word has become flesh! ([Jn 1:14](#)) The incarnation of the Word, like salt ([Mt 5:13](#)), gives flavor even to the most mundane aspect of daily life. It's in the intentional involvement with the person of Jesus that we see with new eyes and experience the extraordinary dimension of ordinary things and events: the temporary becomes memorable and eternal (everlasting). That's why Mary prescribes: "Do whatever he tells you." ([Jn 2:5](#)) By listening to him ([Jn 18:37](#); [10:20](#); [Mk 9:7](#)) and by doing what he tells us to do, hearers become doers, servants become disciples, strangers become friends ([Jn 15:15](#)) and the Word of God dwells richly among us ([Col 3:16](#)). Christ becomes the head, the

heart, the mind of all those who take him seriously and put him at the center and forefront of their conversations and dealings ([Col 1:18](#)). A genuine practice of his Word allows us to see “heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

The marriage of God with Israel (Hosea 2:14-23), is a common metaphor in the Bible ([Is 61:10](#); [62:4-5](#); [Jer 30:17](#); [19:7](#); [21:2](#); [22:17](#)) and the abundance of wine is figure of an eschatological image of restoration ([Joel 3:18](#); [Amos 9:11-15](#)). The abundance of wine and saving the good wine for last draws upon this imagery of eschatological hope that is often coupled with messianic expectations. If we get good wine now, imagine what will be later!

Isaiah’s imagery of a free feast with an open invitation to all (Isaiah 55:1-2) reminds us that from the beginning, God’s work for Israel would be work for the world at large. While Messianic expectations often focused on political redemption and independence for the nation of Israel, God’s “love for David” (Isaiah 55:3) was intended to draw in other nations (Isaiah 55:4-5). After another famous act of hospitality where Jesus washes his disciples’ feet, John famously commands that those who follow Jesus should “love one another” (John 13:31-35). The Gospel’s story shows that the goal of this love is that the whole world might be reconciled to God (John 17:20-23). God’s abundant provision of life goes beyond the anticipated boundaries.

The more I spend time with Jesus, the more I see water turned into wine in me and my heart softens. The more I heed Mary’s words to do what Jesus tells me, the more I am empowered to love, to forgive, to show compassion, to choose to be simple, to share what I have. When I resist those words and am immune to his message, I see closeness of heart, and my mind is occupied with thoughts of self-justification and of how wrong others are.

The true Church shares Jesus’ concern for the salvation of the world. We start with small acts of presence and hospitality to one another. Acknowledging the other’s presence and humanity, looking in someone’s eyes when greeting him, listening deeply to one another even when we disagree, showing care and respect, building trust among us, becoming simple and open to one another makes good wine: if we want to build something lasting, let us slow down; if we want to experience the divine in us and around us, eternal and abundant life, let us apply his words, his rule to our life; if we want a taste of the banquet of heaven, let us honor our earthly existence, and insist on actions of kindness towards all. What will it take for us to produce good wine today? Are we willing to make the concerns of the suffering ones ours?

May we be blessed with holy concern for others, new ears to hear, new eyes to see, new wine to share.