

The Inclusive Community

Second Sunday after Epiphany in Ordinary Time

January 17, 2010

John 2:1-11 Discipleship

Homily of Anthony T. Padovano

Let us suppose someone asked us to write a script for a film or a play about history's most influential personality, about someone so awesome that attributes would be assigned to him that were assigned to no one else. These attributes include that he was the Son of God, that he came back to life after death, that he sent God's spirit into the world, that he is present in our celebrations until the end of time..

Let us assume further that no other birth story would grip humanity more powerfully or emotionally and that no other death story would hold so intently the world's attention for millennia, criss-crossed with grief and hope.

There has never been, there never will be, one might conjecture, a biography of such magnitude and depth. No other religious founder, Moses, Buddha, or Mohammed would have their message so identified with their life story. None of this implies superiority or inferiority. We are speaking of uniqueness, not precedence.

Let us assume this and assume that we have been asked to write a script about such a person.

I do not think we would highlight in the opening lines that the first extraordinary deed was seeing to it that people at a wedding got enough wine to make them happy. Such a story does not fit Moses or Buddha or Mohammed. They would require different stories, more solemn than this.

Cana is a marginal community in Israel. The wedding couple is never named. The story has all the coordinates of insignificance. It is only in John's Gospel, nowhere else in the New Testament. The mother of Jesus, who has a significant part in the story and the dialogue, is not named, as she never is anywhere in John's Gospel.

The story has references that seem beside the point. The water jars, for example, are filled to the brim. We are going to get as much wine out of this as possible. Each jar holds some 30 gallons. There are six of them. That means we are going to get 180 gallons of wine.

Quite a party. No one in Cana will be sober after that. There will be so much wine that drinking it will take a village. Furthermore, a steward comments that this is not cheap wine but the best. There he is tasting it and giving it a grade.

John adds that after this miracle Jesus had disciples who believed in him. We might ask why they were following and what they expected.

Quite a story. I think any editor would reject the story as implausible because it does not fit the character. If Jesus is to be this astonishing personality, if his career is about to be the most stunning, perhaps, in world history, this is simply unworthy, a foolish beginning, a bit silly, beside the point. Why should we care, why should we care about a bride and groom and their steward who miscalculated on the wine their guests would drink or , perhaps, did not have enough money to pay for sufficient wine at their own party. Embarrassing, yes. But does not the Son of God deserve a better introduction than that? No film director or stage manager would do the scene. It is, well, ridiculous.

Or is it?

What if you wanted to show that God cares about all the details of our lives? Such a caring God does not imply a God who makes these details happen. Mothers love us and they care about every detail. They don't bring these things about but rather take them into account because they love us....the first tooth....the first word.....the first step....all the birthdays. They know the favorite food of their children and what memories the child finds sad and where the child feels pain and what stories delight the child.

Love is a symphony of details. Love is noticing and caring. Lasting love is not solemn or grand; it is a network of silly, trivial concerns that make a world of difference. How you like your coffee or what is your favorite vegetable or the color you prefer and the music that enchants you. If you love someone, you do not fill their lives with fortune-cookie wisdom or grand philosophical proclamations. You do not see to it that they get their creeds right and their rubrics correct and their dogmas certain. You bring them the wine they like and you let them know you noticed which wine they favor. You show them in this way, that you love them. And it is all in the cup of coffee or the glass of wine or the simple gesture or the seemingly trivial detail. No one is more attentive to trivia than people in love. These same people give us their lives and would die for us. It was never about trivia. It was about reaching one another's heart. It was about saying that nothing in your life is insignificant to me. I care about it all.

If God were only like that. In today's Gospel, John tries to tell us that this is exactly what God is like. Who would have imagined this? John says the disciples of Jesus did, This, he tells us, was when they first came to believe in him. A disciple of Jesus accepts God on such terms. Who would have imagined that God is so human? The disciples of Jesus did and do. Are you one of them?