

2nd Sunday of Year--Cycle C
(Isa 62:1-5; 1 Cor 12:4-11; John 2:1-11)

I like to think how far we have advanced liturgically from many years ago. It was too long ago for some of you to remember, but in those days we had only two readings. They were read in Latin, from the altar, with the priest's back to the people. The epistle was read on the right side of the altar, then the altar boy would carry the book to the left side, where the celebrant read the gospel. So we spoke of the epistle side and the gospel side. Since both readings were in Latin, both had to be read again from the pulpit in English. How many here remember that? Were these the "good old days"? Would you like to see them return? Well, some people would.

Before Vatican II there was only an annual cycle and no Old Testament reading. When the third reading was introduced, a liturgist of my acquaintance said that it was pastorally a disaster--the people would not sit still so long. I'm happy to say you have proved him wrong. See how much richness has been added with, for example, today's Old Testament reading with God's beautiful promises of better times for Israel. (This passage, from the third part of Isaiah, addresses an Israel returned from exile but with a land in ruins, the people without hope. The people "divorced" by God are now promised a new espousal. Here we have an anticipation of the Christian Church, the "Bride of Christ.")

Today's gospel actually seems to pertain to the Epiphany season and so strikes me as anomalous. Officially that season is over; this is the second ordinary Sunday of the year and we're back to green vestments. But the gospel theme belongs with Epiphany. Remember that Epiphany means "manifestation." It began with the Magi from the East. The main point of that story is an anticipation of the Gentiles (in the person of the Magi) coming to know and worship Jesus Christ. As Christianity began, the believers were, necessarily, Jews. But soon, specifically at Antioch, Gentiles began to receive the word. It was not long before opposition among Jewish leaders brought Jewish conversions largely to a halt. As things developed, then, the greater number of believers came to be Gentiles.

If we look back to the OT, messianic hope sprang largely from God's promise to David of a dynasty that would

last forever, a promise that obviously was not fulfilled in Israel's history, but which Christians see fulfilled in Jesus, the Son of David. The promises to David, as developed and expanded in the psalms, were very universalistic, i.e., seen to relate not only to Israel but to involve all nations: God promises David, "I will make your inheritance the nations, your possession the ends of the earth"; the psalmist expresses the hope, "May he rule from sea to sea ... May the kings of Tarshish and the islands bring tribute. May all kings bow before him, all nations serve him." By the end of the NT believers could see this coming to pass historically. In the story of the Magi, Matthew presents early in his gospel an anticipation of what was later to come about; he describes it in the very words of the psalm--the kings of the east coming to offer tribute.

But the mystery of Epiphany is more expansive than simply the visit of the Magi. At Lauds of Epiphany we have an antiphon that expresses it very well. You may remember that Abbot James sang it for us at Mass that day; I, not having so good a voice as he, will simply recite it: "Today the Bridegroom claims his bride, the Church, since Christ has washed her sins away in Jordan's waters; the Magi hasten with their gifts to the royal wedding; and the wedding guests rejoice, for Christ has changed water into wine, alleluia." The full manifestation of our Savior includes also His baptism (last Sunday), which is presented as His acquisition of the Church as His bride. But there was also Jesus first miracle; and John concludes this account by declaring, "Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs at Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him."

It is well worth looking in more detail at this gospel, so closely related to the Epiphany theme and so instructive about Our Lady as intercessor. The story tells of Jesus and His disciples at a wedding. Strangely it begins by naming Mary first, and then almost secondarily, "Jesus and his disciples were also invited." Some have suggested that the presence of this thirsty group might well explain why the hosts ran short of wine. Be that as it may, the account doesn't support the Southern Baptists or any group that would impose total abstinence. Mary approaches the matter tactfully by telling Jesus "They have no wine." No doubt she feels the distress of the bride, the embarrassment of the groom; perhaps she senses

the possibility of recriminations marring the happy affair! Jesus' response means something like, "What does this have to do with us?" His reason might seem apt to carry the day, "My time has not yet come." Whatever, Mary walks over it roughshod with her order to the servers. That she can so confidently order them in someone else's home demonstrates the great respect she commanded.

But we know the result. It not only relieved the shortage that would have spoiled the party but, more importantly, revealed Jesus' glory and led his disciples to believe in Him. That John calls this a "sign" makes it especially significant, for this is in the part of his gospel called "the book of signs." That is, through the end of chapter 12 there are seven miracles which John sees as revealing the meaning of Jesus and His work in a

But this account also reveals much about Mary's special way. role as intercessor. It is significant that it was Mary who saw the need and took action. Certainly she was not more compassionate than Jesus. But John presents Mary as Mother of us all. It was not just to anyone that Jesus, on the cross, commends to Mary as her son, but "the beloved disciple," the otherwise nameless disciple, the one who leaned on Jesus' breast at the Last Supper, the first to believe in the resurrection, and who stands as the ideal disciple and therefore for all of us. By this John shows Mary persuading Jesus to an action He had not planned. Thus John recommends that we turn to Mary, who brings our needs to Jesus. So perhaps we can expand the Epiphany theme a little more to make it a manifestation of Mary as the one Jesus give us as our intercessor.