

Homily given at the Cathedral of St. Matthew on the 2nd Sunday of the Year
January 17, 2016
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At a Marian retreat for women some years ago, when speaking about Mary's Assumption, I mentioned that the Jewish artist Ernst Fuchs, a convert, painted a picture of it. It was not at all like many images of Mary, statue-like, being lifted up on a cherubic elevator. Fuchs depicted her dancing with delight before God, reminiscent of King David dancing with abandon before the Ark of God. After the talk, a woman came to me and told me what she thought Mary did when she arrived in heaven. She thought that when Mary saw her Son sitting at the place of honor at the right side of the Father, she could not hold back proudly announcing to the angels and saints around: "That's my boy!"

Mothers and fathers rightly take pride in their children's achievements, and some push them to do it. In today's story of the wedding at Cana, one might see some of that motherly trait in Mary. She did not accept Jesus' disclaimer, "It is not my time yet." Instead, she took charge and told the servants: "You just do whatever he tells you." So Jesus complies and performs his first miracle. Why did he do this extravagant multiplication of wine at a wedding? He turned so much water into wine there had to be a huge amount left over, and it was of finest quality. As the headwaiter said to the host, "What you have done is keep the choicest wine until now."

St. John's narrations often have many layers of meaning. The uniqueness of the miracle at Cana was more than a gracious response to relieve a host's embarrassment. An abundance of wine and produce of the land was a common metaphoric description of the coming Messianic kingdom foretold by the prophets and in the psalms. Jesus' multiplying the wine at a wedding feast could be seen as symbolic of the eventual fulfillment of those prophecies when Jesus completes his new creation in the kingdom to come.

It is no wonder that our relationship with God, with Jesus is often spoken of in connection with marriage. The consummation of marriage is the deepest human experience of union. In The Book of Genesis we read, "At the beginning God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and the two shall become as one." St. Paul quotes this text in the letter to the Ephesians with his advice to married couples, and goes beyond its human application to say, "This is a great foreshadowing; I mean that it refers to Christ and the church." He also wrote in the same letter: "Husbands should love their wives as they do their own body...as Christ cares for the church – for we are members of his body."

The end of love is union. There is an even deeper spiritual union for each one of us with God through Jesus. In the first reading the prophet Isaiah put these words in God's mouth: "As a young man marries a virgin, your Builder shall marry you; and as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so shall your God rejoice in you." God is always faithful, even when we are not to our baptismal promises. Jesus often uses parables relating to celebrating marriage in describing what the Kingdom of God is like. He told about wedding guests coming and taking places of honor, then embarrassed to be asked to make room for someone more important. There is the parable about the five foolish virgins who did not have oil for their lamps and one about the servants who were warned not to be asleep when the bridegroom arrives. It is not surprising that Jesus himself is referred to as a bridegroom. John the Baptist spoke of him that way when he was questioned about Jesus baptizing and people going to him. John responded, "It is the groom who has the bride. The groom's best man waits there listening for him and is overjoyed to hear his voice. He must increase while I must decrease."

I have been reminding you of all this to prepare you to turn now to the altar for the offerings, the consecration and the banquet that follows. Just before communion, the priest announces, "Blessed are they who come to the supper of the Lamb." This 'supper' can be thought of as a wedding feast. At every Mass Jesus invites us to be his wedding guests at the table where he makes the perfect offering to God with his self-emptying obedience. By that sacrifice he cleanses us from our sins and makes us worthy to be one with him as members of his body, the church, his bride.

To grow ever more intimate in union with Jesus, we had best come to this feast in proper wedding garments. That certainly includes sincere repentance for our sins, mutual forgiveness, and trust in Jesus' fidelity to his promises. In one sense it does not matter where we sit in the church, we are all of equal worth in God's eyes, all are saved from slavery to sin and death by the blood of Jesus, the bridegroom of our souls. To him, with the Father and the Holy Spirit let us offer fitting worship, praise and thanksgiving for ever and ever. AMEN.