

Today's Gospel tells us there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and interestingly the first person mentioned as attending is "*the mother of Jesus*". Then we are told Jesus and his disciples also attended. As I'll explain, there are important clues in John's presentation of Jesus' mother.

We should understand that in that culture, wedding feasts usually lasted seven days. Clearly, they took both marriage and the celebration of the wedding very seriously. Just as it would be in our time, it would have been a terrible embarrassment for the host of a wedding to run out of wine. Jesus' mother informs him, "*They have no wine.*" I can imagine these words were accompanied by the persuasive look mothers give can their children. But his response sounds dismissive, like saying, "*That may be their problem. It might be your problem, but it's not mine.*"

Yet through her maternal instincts, Jesus came to see it as *our* problem, reminding us that no one in the universe knows Jesus better than his mother. In this beginning to his public ministry, the very fact that he alters his plans, tells us something about her powerful intercession. But more than just needing Jesus to act, she also recognizes the need for the servers to do their part. She gives them the best commandment anyone could give another person: "*Do whatever he tells you.*"

As Jesus instructed, the servants filled the six large stone jars: somewhere between 120 and 180 gallons. It's way more than practically was needed, but it speaks to a deeper meaning of this miraculous act, or more properly, this *sign*. It's more than just the solution to the shortage of wine at this particular wedding. It's a sign, because after all, Jesus did not come just to fix momentary crises in our lives. All his miracles, these signs, are meant to inform us that he has come to bring joy—symbolized in the wine—and to bring it in great abundance: something that was still unknown to the people of God.

We should also understand that in that culture, it was the responsibility of the bridegroom to ensure that the guests had wine. And so, the head waiter, unaware of how this miracle happened, rightly compliments the bridegroom: *You've saved the best wine for this moment!* But this sign is telling us that, Jesus was responsible for providing this flavorful abundance of wine. In other words, this sign tells us that Jesus is the bridegroom.

So back to this unique presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In this gospel, she only appears twice: once at this wedding—the beginning of Jesus' public ministry—and then at the foot of the cross—the end his public ministry. In both incidents, we learn some important spiritual truths about her. First, John does not refer to her by her proper name *Mary*, but instead as "*the mother of Jesus*". And in both incidents, Jesus does not call her *mother*, but instead *woman*. Why these impersonal ways of referring to her?

By leaving her unnamed, she symbolizes more than a single person. And in referring to her as woman, she can be understood to personify the people of God in feminine form. Jesus is shown here to be the true bridegroom, and Mary represents the humble, receptive, faithful and obedient true bride of the Lord. In this sign, the wedding feast of Cana, Mary's relationship with Jesus shifts: no longer merely his mother, she now takes on the additional role of being a disciple.

While this gospel should strengthen our trust in Mary's powerful intercession, perhaps we do well to consider what it says about marriage itself. Clearly, it tells us something about Jesus blessing the institution of marriage and seeing himself in connection with it.

The fact that the couple plays no active role in this narrative says something important. It's less about them, and more about Jesus. Weddings themselves become merely reduced to "my special day", when instead, they should be properly understood as something so much more, something transcendent, beyond the couple.

But further, beyond the wedding day itself, married life comes with so many challenges, just as the couple in this narrative account experienced. But the challenges are magnified when either or both spouses make it merely about themselves, instead of about the one who is so much more, turning to him to be our strength, the wine of our joy.

My intention is not to dismiss the complexity and difficulty that can come with married life, but to suggest that our marriages would be strengthened, and the challenges would be more manageable, if we truly heeded the advice of his mother: "*Do whatever he tells you.*"