

God keeps the best wine to the last

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

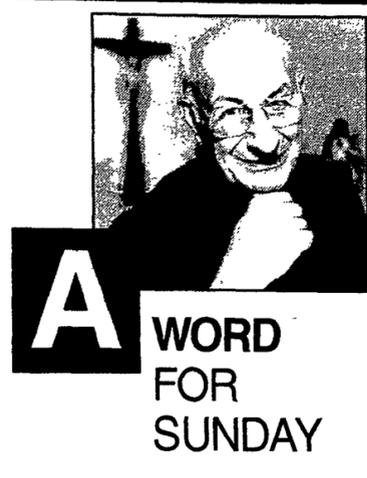
Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 2:1-12; (R1) Isaiah 62:1-5; (R2) 1 Corinthians 12:4-11.

Jesus began His public life with a banquet and ended it with a banquet. At both banquets, wine played an important part.

The first banquet was at Cana, about six miles northeast of Nazareth. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was at this banquet. Joseph no doubt was dead at this time, or else he, too, would have been there. Jesus was also there, but He brought along five disciples and this might have caused the shortage of wine.

Mary discovered the shortage. A wine failure at a wedding feast would have been a catastrophe. It would have prematurely ended a feast that was to last from three to seven days. That would have caused a regular donnybrook: guests would have turned on the groom, the groom on the bride, the bride's parents on the groom's parents. Thanks to Jesus and Mary, the problem never materialized.

Mary noticed the shortage because she was probably serving the guests. Immediately, she hurried to Jesus.



"They have no more wine," she told Him. Jesus replied, "Woman, how does this concern of yours involve me? My hour has not yet come."

There is not the slightest trace of a rebuke in His words. Jesus was speaking in Aramaic and "woman" is the English equivalent of the utmost respect. Jesus, the model of every virtue, would never address His mother save with the greatest reverence. Moreover, Mary was acting out of charity to prevent embarrassment to the hosts and

Jesus would be the last person in the world to rebuke a request prompted only by charity.

We must remember that John is recording this incident. He was writing 60 or 70 years after it had happened. In hindsight he saw more than the miracle. He was interpreting it. He saw its deeper signification.

The abundance of wine distributed at Cana was for John a sign of the abundance of gifts Jesus would give when His hour had come. His hour came at another banquet — the Last Supper — and ended on the cross. At Cana, He changed water into wine; at the Last Supper, He changed wine into His body and blood. On the Cross, He again spoke to His mother as "woman" when He said, "Woman, behold, your son." For Jesus would have us see that Mary is the woman of Genesis (15:3) and the woman of Revelation (12:1) clothed with the sun, confronting the red dragon — the new Eve, the Mother of all the living, our Mother.

After having given her to us, John does not say that Jesus died; rather he said, "And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit."

Thus John saw Cana as a sign of the greatest miracles of Jesus when His

hour would come; namely, His giving us His body and blood in the Eucharist; His giving us His mother; and His giving us the Holy Spirit.

Feodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevski remarked once that Jesus's first miracle was not to heal the sick, cure the blind, raise the dead, or drive out demons. His first miracle was to save a young couple from being embarrassed on their wedding day, to prevent the joy of a wedding feast from turning into a brawl.

Jesus came onto life's stage just to make everybody happy and to spread joy. His coming was tidings of great joy; and His message was good news. So many marriages today are filled with anything but joy. The reason is that Jesus and Mary have not been invited into so many marriages.

The key to joy in life and in marriages is to keep Jesus and Mary in your lives and in your marriages. If you do so, then should the wine of love and joy ever fail, they will work veritable miracles to restore them. And as the years go on, that love and joy will so increase, that at the twilight of life, you will be able to say, "You have, Lord, kept the best wine to the last."

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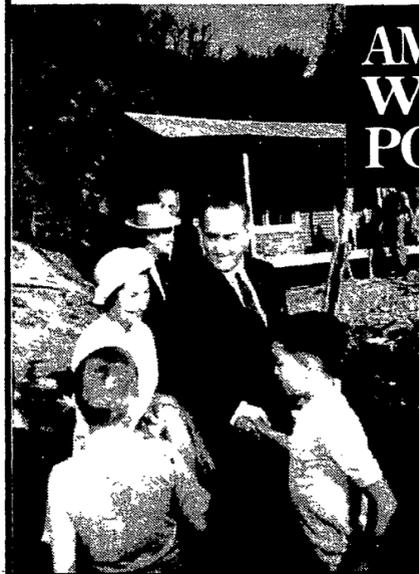
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