



Remember me in Your Kingdom

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The Wedding at Cana (John 2:1-12)

In the Lectionary of the Church

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In the history and practice of the Church, there are three main reasons for the observance of the holy season of Great Lent. The first is to prepare for the celebration of Holy Week and Pascha (Easter). This is the original intent of the season. This preparation consists of the purification of the faithful from their sins by prayer, almsgiving, fasting and confession. The faithful undertake this purification in order to meet Christ in the liturgical celebrations of Holy Week and Pascha. In the Melkite and Greek Orthodox Churches most of the Sunday Gospels point forward to the Cross and Resurrection of Christ, while the Epistles, taken from Hebrews, tell us the meaning of the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. The season lasts for 40 days, just as Christ fasted for 40 days (Matthew 4:2), and Moses spent 40 days on Mt. Sinai with God (Exodus 24:18). In the Eastern Churches, Catholic and Orthodox, the Season of Lent begins on the Monday before the First Sunday of Lent. From this Monday to the Friday before Palm Sunday is exactly 40 days. Holy Week is something different for the observation of the suffering and death and resurrection of Christ begins with Holy Week. In the Roman Catholic Church Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, the Wednesday before the First Sunday of Lent, and it ends on Holy Thursday afternoon. The Triduum or 3 Sacred Days (Thursday-Saturday) are the celebration of the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. Lent lasts 44 days, and is followed by the Triduum for Roman Catholics.

A second reason for Lent was added in the 4th Century. The bishops at that time decided that the best time of the year to baptize people would be on Holy Saturday (the Saturday of Light), because baptism makes us participants in the death and resurrection of

Christ (Romans 6:3-13). This added a catechetical dimension to Lent, and the reading of the Old Testament, especially Genesis on weekdays, became common during the season, as well as sermons and classes to instruct the candidates for Baptism. Part of the instruction that they received was an explanation of the Sacraments of Baptism, Chrismation (Confirmation) and Eucharist (Holy Communion). The Gospel of Saint John speaks often of these Sacraments, and therefore in Rome, Egypt and other places as well, this Gospel was read during Lent. In the Byzantine Churches (Melkite and Greek Orthodox) the Gospel of Saint John is read from Easter to Pentecost Sunday, because Pentecost Sunday is also a great day for Baptism in the Early Church.

The third reason for Lent, since the 4th Century, has been the reconciliation of penitents to the Church. Penitents are sinners who committed great sins like murder, adultery and apostasy. They were excluded from the Sacraments and Church life for a while, and then reconciled on Holy Thursday. Readings from the Bible, especially from the Gospel of Saint Luke, regarding purification, repentance and forgiveness were added to the lectionaries in some Churches. Stories such as the Publican and Pharisee, and the Prodigal Son were read. In the Byzantine Churches (Melkite and Greek Orthodox) these Gospels are read before Lent begins, and in the Maronite Church they are read during Lent.

Now we turn to the various spiritual interpretations of the Gospel Story of the Wedding at Cana in Galilee. Looking at the event as a wedding feast the Church has drawn the conclusion that by it Christ elevated marriage to be a Sacrament. We see Jesus present at the wedding; the God-Man is present and blesses the occasion. He performs his first miracle, changing the water into wine, and this is done for the benefit of the couple and the celebration. This miracle is a further blessing upon the wedding, and is seen as the elevation of marriage to a Sacrament. Water is good, but wine is better. Jesus changes the good marriage of the Old Testament into the sacramental marriage of the New Testament, which is better. This passage is read at the wedding service in the Byzantine Churches (Melkite and Orthodox), and is one of the options for the Maronite Service.

A second interpretation of the passage relates it to Baptism and Eucharist. Jesus is the Bridegroom of the Church according to Saint Paul (Ephesians 5:21-32). This teaching is also present in the Book of Revelations (Revelations 19:5-10, 21:9-27). The Saints taught us that since Christ is the Groom of the Church, He is also the Groom of each Christian soul through Baptism. Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, and other Saints, called the day of the baptism of the believer, the day of their marriage to Christ. In the Gospel story the water in the Jars of Purification is seen to represent the waters of baptism that purify us (Titus 3:5), and the wine represents the Eucharist (Blood of Christ). This scene is connected to the death of Christ on the Cross, when water and wine issued

from his pierced side (John 19:31-37). Saint John Chrysostom, and other Saints, said that the side of Christ issued forth the two Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. The Church is built upon these two great Sacraments, therefore the Church came from the side of Christ in the sleep of death, just as Eve came from the side of Adam while he was in a deep sleep (Genesis 2:21-24). The wife of Adam (Eve) came from Adam's side; the wife of Christ (the Church) also comes from Christ's side.

In the Gospel Story Jesus supplies the wine and thus becomes the host of the party instead of the groom. This is seen as referring to the celebration of the Divine Liturgy (Mass or Qorbono). At the Liturgy the priest or bishop leads us in our celebration, but then Jesus gives us His Body and Blood to consume. Thus in the end, Jesus becomes the leader of our celebration rather than the priest. The priest starts the celebration representing Christ, but ultimately is replaced by Christ who comes to each person as they receive Holy Communion. This sacramental interpretation of this Gospel story is why this passage is read in the Maronite Church before Lent begins.

A third interpretation that we obtain from this Gospel passage is the role of Mary as an intercessor for Christians. We see that Mary is present at the Wedding with Jesus, just like she is present with Him in Heaven. She then makes a request on behalf of the wedding party, not herself. She also has complete confidence that Jesus will respond to her request, even though He remarked that it is not his time. Jesus does indeed fulfill her request, and performs the miracle. Then we see that Mary accompanies Jesus to Capernaum for several days. To this scene we add the one at the foot of the cross when Jesus gave his mother to Saint John (John 19:25-27), thus making her the Mother of all Christians. So, our spiritual mother, Mary, intercedes for us with her Divine Son Jesus. He in turn grants the requests of his Mother, which are for the benefit of the Christians who pray to her.

The life of the Church is generous, diverse and luxuriant, as is the life of God's creation. Things can have more than one meaning as we saw with the purposes of Great Lent. Biblical stories can also teach us more than one lesson as we saw with the passage of the Wedding at Cana.