



The Wedding at Cana by Frans Francken the Younger, c. 1618–20.

IN READING THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN, it is not difficult to see that the Evangelist has what could be called a deeply sacramental vision of reality. That is, he sees that the visible realities of creation and especially the visible realities surrounding the ministry of Christ, are signs that point to much deeper and more important spiritual realities. St. John the Evangelist, the great mystic writer, expects that, when we read his Gospel, we will look for and search out these deeper and more important realities that his narratives are pointing to.

We find in chapter 2 of John's Gospel, in the story of the wedding feast of Cana, the first words spoken by Our Blessed Mother in the Gospel of St. John: "They have no wine." The immediate context of this remark

obviously refers to the fact that the wedding party has run out of wine and they need more wine to avoid a painful and embarrassing situation and so Our Blessed Mother is requesting that Our Lord remedy the matter. Now, if John the Evangelist is able to see the spiritual realities pointed to by the visible realities of this world, how much more so the Virgin Mary who possesses a fullness of the Holy Spirit. Her mind

was completely formed and saturated with the images and language of Sacred Scripture. She thought about the realities of everyday life through the lens of God's word. What we find is that Sacred Scripture uses a lack of wine as an image for God's displeasure and the punishment He inflicts in response to men's sins and infidelities. In chapter 24 of the prophet Isaiah we read:

"God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there, there is no such thing."

– C.S. Lewis

“The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant...The wine mourns, the vine languishes, all the merry-hearted sigh...No more do they drink wine with singing; ...There is an outcry in the streets for lack of wine; all joy has reached its even-tide; the gladness of the earth is banished.” When we have forsaken the commandments of God and seek to find our happiness in the passing pleasures of this life, we have abandoned the path that leads to true joy. As C.S. Lewis once remarked: “God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there, there is no such thing.”

But then, in the very next chapter, Isaiah prophesies the coming salvation of God in terms of a feast with fine wine: *“On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all people a feast of fat things, a feast of fine wine, of fat things full of marrow, of fine wine well refined. And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the covering that is cast over all nations. He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of the people he will take away from all the earth”* (Isa 25:6-8).

If we attempt to enter into the heart and mind of the Blessed Mother, we find there a burning furnace of charity for all mankind, an intense maternal love for her children. On the one hand, in virtue of her Immaculate Conception and her fullness of grace, she experiences a very deep and intense intimacy with God that brings her immense joy. On the other hand, she cannot help but see most men living in a state of spiritual darkness, spending all their energies in pursuit of creatures that cannot possibly bring them true joy and lasting happiness. She sees men desperately trying to satisfy the thirst and cravings of their hearts in ways that are futile and vain and this surely must be the source of deep pain for our Blessed Mother, just as it is painful for any devout Christian to see the spiritual darkness and disorder of most men’s lives. And so, the Blessed Mother



goes to her Son, the Savior, and says: “They have no wine... Mankind is lacking the wine that can bring them true joy, the joy for which they were made, and the joy that only you can bring them.” “They have no wine— isn’t it time now to bring them the wine of salvation, isn’t it time to fulfill the mission for which I brought you into the world?” That Our Lord understands His mother’s petition in this way is made manifest by how He responds to her implied request: “My hour has not yet come.” Our Lord speaks of His passion and death which will bring mankind the lasting wine of salvation.

Are you thirsting for the wine of salvation? How thirsty are you for this wine? Have you ever experienced the joy and inebriation of this wine? As we also read in the prophet Isaiah, this wine cannot be purchased, it can only be received as a gift: *“Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”*(Isa 55:1) In order to drink the wine of salvation we need to renounce all ungodly self-reliance and the desire to manage and direct our redemption according to our own lights. *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord.”*(Isa 55:9) There is a need to embrace our poverty before God: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.”*(Matt 5:3) Our souls are thirsting; our psyches are constantly searching for that which will bring true joy and satisfaction. We can spend a lot of time and effort and energy in pursuing things that cannot possibly satisfy us in a deep and lasting way. *“Everyone who drinks of this water [i.e., the water of creatures] will thirst again.”*(Jn 4:13) And as the prophet says: *“Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?”*(Isa 55:2) We can seek a kind of ultimate satisfaction in many different things: in our human relationships and human loves. We can live with the illusion that some great human love can completely satisfy our hearts. That is an error which can only lead to continual frustration. We

can seek our joy in the comforts and pleasures that life affords. We can seek our joy in our ability to dominate and control other people or in a disordered desire to gain their respect and honor. We can seek our joy in an abundance of possessions and financial security. Most of these things are not bad in themselves, but we have a tendency to make idols out of them. But God, in His mercy, has ways of smashing our idols. A helpful way to examine ourselves can be to consider: what are the things that bring me joy? That is always a good indication of what our hearts really cherish and what kind of person we really are.

The season of Lent, which we are now about to begin, is a time to take a more serious look at these questions; a time to make an honest examination of the way we choose to live, a time to ask God for the light to see the way to true joy and to experience in a deeper way the joy of salvation. Often, when people think of Lent what is foremost in their minds and imaginations is a time of

self-imposed bodily mortification. But if we lose sight of the fact that bodily mortification is ordered to freeing up the spirit so that we can have a firmer possession on spiritual goods that bring us true joy, then we are missing the point. Lent should be a time when we experience spiritual joy more *intensely*.

Our Blessed Mother, in her second and final word in the Gospel of St. John gives us the key that opens the door to the wine cellar of God's salvation: "*Do whatever He tells you.*" (Jn 2:5) St. Thomas Aquinas, in commenting on this word of our Blessed Mother says that it expresses the whole of Christian perfection, because perfection is found in obeying Christ in all things. One of the things that He commanded us was: "*Do this in remembrance of me.*" (Lk 22:19) When we follow this command of the Lord, in celebrating the Eucharist worthily, we will be sure to experience the wine of God's salvation. "*I will raise the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord*" (Psa 116:13).✠