

Homily for January 17, 2010 (2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, C)
St. Martin de Porres Parish, Milwaukee
Isaiah 62:1-5; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; John 2:1-11

I'll never be accused of being a sommelier (sə-məl-yā). I can barely pronounce it! For those of you that don't know, that's the proper title for a wine expert or steward. I couldn't tell you the difference between a chablis and a zinfandel or between a port and merlot. That doesn't mean, however, that I'm completely uncouth. I know that there are some basic ways to tell a fine wine from a lesser vintage:

- Fine wines have corks. Lesser vintages have screw top caps.
- Fine wines are served at room temperature. Lesser vintages can be served right out of the cooler or over ice.
- Fine wines must be allowed to breathe right after being opened. Lesser vintages can be inhaled right away.
- Fine wines must be carefully poured into a glass. Lesser vintages can be drunk straight from the bottle.
- Fine wines should be displayed so all can see the bottle and label. Lesser vintages are best left in the paper bag.
- Fine wines are shared at the table. Lesser vintages are shared on the corner.

Regardless of their vintage, appearance or price, all wines have something in common: water. In fact, most wines are 80-90% water. John tells us in the gospel that when Jesus changed water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana it was “the beginning of the signs” that he performed to reveal his glory and invite his disciples to believe in him. While it was an important sign of God's presence and action for them, it may be an even bigger one for us.

Most of us think of ourselves as pretty ordinary people—much like those six stone jars of water that were used for the Jewish ceremonial washings. [John notes that each jar held about 20-30 gallons, which means that they had the equivalent of 120-180 gallons of water. Why so much? Wedding feasts in Jesus' time were social events not only for the families involved but for the whole community. They lasted up to a week. Think of the bills and hangovers after *those* receptions!]

The Good News for us today is that what Jesus did with that water at Cana he also does with the waters of our baptism! Just as he made the water into wine, he makes us into members of his body at baptism. We see this in the Rite of Baptism. After being immersed in the waters we were anointed with oil and told:

God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has freed you from sin, given you new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and welcomed you into his holy people. God now anoints you with the chrism of salvation.

As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, so may you live always as members of his body and share in everlasting life.

Just so we don't forget it, the Church reminds us of this great miracle of grace every time we celebrate the Eucharist! During the Preparation of Gifts, as the priest or deacon is pouring some water into the wine, he prays:

By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.

Think about that for a moment. The same deep love that led God to bring the people of Israel back from exile led him to send his Son to share fully in our human condition so that we might be led back into union with God. The miracle at Cana is also a miracle in us!

Admiral William "Bull" Halsey, Commander of the Pacific Fleet in WWII once said that, "There aren't any great men. There are just great challenges that ordinary men are forced by circumstances to meet." While that may be true, as people of faith we also believe that God has placed within each and all of us something special. In our second reading, Paul describes them as "spiritual gifts."

It's important to recall that at the time he wrote his First Letter to the Corinthians the church there was a church divided: over leadership (see 1 Cor 3), class (see 1 Cor 11), and charisms or spiritual gifts. It was that last concern that Paul addressed in Chapter 12. Some people in the community believed that their gifts (particularly speaking in tongues) were not only signs of God's blessing but also signs that God had blessed them *more* than anyone else. That gave *their* gifts and their ministries, they thought, a privileged place in the church.

We can still have that problem in the church today. Some folks believe that their titles make them more important. Others believe that just because they are paid for their ministries they're better than others who volunteer. Still others believe that ordination automatically makes them an authority about everything and that God appointed them not to serve but to rule. (We call that sin clericalism.) St. Paul's antidote to this poisonous privileging of gifts was to focus on:

- Where the gifts come from (the same Spirit/Lord/God, 1 Cor 12:4-6);
- Who receives them (each and all of us, for some benefit, 1 Cor 12:7);
- How they're manifest (wisdom, faith, healing, etc., 1 Cor. 12:8-11).

Please take some time this week and read 1 Corinthians 12 in its entirety. Then reflect on your gifts, the gifts of others, and the needs of this community, the wider church and world. *Are you ready to be wine?*

You may think of yourself as just water in a stone jar; but in Christ we have all been made into a wonderful vintage. Don't worry about what others might think. Sometimes the wine that is the most needed depends on the meal that is set before us; sometimes we need to use whatever is available; and sometimes, just as he did at Cana, the Lord saves the best for last. +

