Unwrap Jesus as the Perfect Bridegroom

January 19, 2014

† In Nomine Jesu †

Weddings and marriages are exciting. In our culture many of the arrangements are left up to the bride. In Jesus’ day, the bridegroom was responsible for providing the wedding feast - including, and especially, the wine. That's why when Mary tells Jesus about the problem that has arisen at the wedding they were attending, at Cana, that “They have no wine,” Jesus says to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” It is not His wedding feast. He is not the bridegroom . . . yet.

But Jesus would become a bridegroom. For this is the reason He has come. He has come for His bride, the Church, as St. Paul said. To take her to be His own, and to take her to His home in heaven. He has come to give Himself up for His bride, to lay down His life to His bride. He would not forsake her. He would not come down from the cross. . . But it was not time for the cross yet. That hour was coming, but had not yet come.

Still, Jesus was willing to help this poor, ill prepared bridegroom. So that the joy of this wedding may go on, Jesus miraculously provides wine. And not just any wine, but good wine, better wine than they had before.

This, also, gives us a picture of Jesus and His love for us. This marriage feast, this wedding relationship is the glorious picture of God and His people. Perhaps that’s why God chose a wedding feast as the first stage to unwrap Jesus as the perfect Bridegroom.

It is worth reflecting deeply on this image of Jesus as the Bridegroom. The images that we have both of God and of His Son Jesus are extremely important. Now while there is a place for addressing God in lofty and exalted terms, “Almighty and Everlasting God”, “King of all kings,” if we only relate to God in this way, we will be limiting ourselves to a very formal and cold relationship with God. While we should never lose the sense of holy awe and reverence toward God, we also know that He is our Savior, our Deliverer, our Provider, our Healer and our Friend. Jesus too is also the One who will come again in glory to judge the earth. He is the Lamb of God, the Savior King, but also our friend and brother. And today we see Him as our true bridegroom.

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John 2:1-11
New International Version (NIV)

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine.” 4 “Woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My hour has not yet come.” 5 His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” 6 Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water”; so they filled them to the brim. 8 Then he told them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.” They did so, 9 and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside 10 and said, “Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.” 11 What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.
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The amazing depth of God’s love for His creation is expressed well as passionate love; that of a lover for his beloved. We see this in the book of Hosea and in the Song of Songs. The loving union of man and woman serves as a symbol throughout Scripture of the union God desires between Himself and us. Even in its fullest sense the most perfect and ardent love of man and woman can only be a faint shadow of God’s love for each and every one of his creatures. We are called to intimacy with God, and with His Son, Jesus Christ.

No bride and bridegroom on this earth are perfect. No marriages are perfect. There comes a time when all marriages run out of wine - when the honeymoon is over, the joys are less and the sins are more. When that happens, the answer is not to end the marriage and move on, but to receive from Christ and give to one another the forgiveness we need. That makes the love and joy of marriage deeper.

Yet not just in marriages, but in all of Christian life - as we live as the bride of Christ - is this true. There comes a time when you run out of wine - when joy and happiness are fleeting and trials and troubles are many. It will happen because just as there are no perfect bridegrooms, there are no perfect brides either. We are spotted and stained by sin. We hurt and are hurt. We are unfaithful to the vows we have made to God. And we fall far, far short of the perfect love that excels above all human loves.

In effect at Cana, Jesus fulfilts the role of the Bridegroom by providing the wine of gladness for all at the wedding. Just as Jesus helped that poor, imperfect bridegroom that day in Cana, even more does He come to help you, His bride. For you, He does not simply turn water into wine, but turns wine into blood for you - the blood of the new covenant, the blood of the Lord’s Supper. It is this “wine of gladness” the Blood of the Supper which washes away the sin of us imperfect brides, that we might be holy and without blemish. It gives us a foretaste of the feast to come. It’s a picture of the heavenly wedding feast which will have no end. Jesus comes to us now to restore our joy with His forgiveness and to bring us again into intimacy with Him.

I believe that rather than being centered on plans and programs, needs, success, wholeness or even spiritual gifts, the Church as the bride of Christ must, first of all and above all, pursue that intimate knowledge of God, that joy and worship and consciousness of the Divine Love that we receive. Only when we are brought to our knees in amazement of the love that Jesus has for us can we raise our voices in song or our hands in service spontaneously flows to truly glorify our heavenly Bridegroom.

Jesus is a true Bridegroom; this is His very nature. That is why He is not satisfied when we simply set ourselves under His dominion and give Him slavish obedience. He wants more - He wants our heart. He wants a love that’s true, undiluted and faithful. He woos us with His word. He courts us with His sacraments. He showers gifts upon us, not just for the twelve days of Christmas, but every day of our lives.
He does not force love. It must be freely given. He knocks softly on the door of our heart. He waits until someone opens it. He stands behind the door and looks to see whether His bride will open up and come out to Him (Song of Solomon 5:2). His eyes follow her sadly if all day long she is busy and in a hurry, if she goes about everything quickly and vigorously and yet spiritually is becoming estranged from Him. He has so much love to give Him. Wives serve your husbands this way. Not in fear but in love. Not in the estrangement of things to do, but in joy and love as you serve Christ.

Jesus is a true Bridegroom. His ardent wish is to impart His likeness to His bride so that she too may be adorned with glory. He dreams of the full beauty that one day will be hers. He loves her too much to suffer her to have any "spots" or "wrinkles". Full of pride and joy, His loving eyes sees her as on her wedding day – glorious, beautiful, and radiant. Husbands, we are to see our wives as our brides, whether it's one day, one year or 60 years. We are to see her without the spots and stains of sin, but as she was on our wedding day, radiant, beautiful. Through the power of His blood Jesus brings us to the perfection of divine beauty. He works with special, loving care for you. He guides you, His bride, along paths of righteousness, for this will bring you to where His is.

Jesus is a true Bridegroom. He lives and rules everything for you, His bride. He is the unseen companion along every path; the friendly counselor in every decision; the ever present help in every trouble.

The result of Jesus' miracle was not only that the joy of the wedding continued. But with this sign, Jesus manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him. Was it a perfect faith that they had? By no means! Just as there are no perfect brides or bridegrooms or marriages, so there is no perfect faith on earth. The disciples would continue to have doubts and struggles, just as we do.

As the bride of Christ, do we find joy in His presence? Are you excited about being with Him, in His house? Do you carry His name with pride and joy? There are times, aren't there, that the wine runs out in our life as Christ's bride. We grow bored or at least apathetic about Him. We grumble and complain that the bride's work is never done. Our sinful nature chafes because of its loss of "freedom" to do what it wants, to come and go as it wants. Sometimes, if we are honest, it seems the honey moon of our faith is over.

Instead like the disciples, we see His glory manifested in Jesus. We see the glory of His coming to earth in His incarnation; the glory of His coming to bear our sin and be our Savior; the glory of His ascending the cross in our place; the glory of his resurrection. We see the glory of all His work for us and for our salvation. And so we believe in Him. We believe He is our bridegroom.

That's when Jesus our heavenly Bridegroom comes to us again. He promises: "I will take you to be My wife forever. I will take you to be My wife in righteousness, justice, love, and compassion. 20 I will take you to be My wife in faithfulness, and you will know (me as LORD) (Yahweh.)" (HCS Hosea 2:19-20).
That is the Jesus unwrapped for us this day; the gift given to us at Christmas. In His incarnation, He became bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and the two - God and man - became one flesh in Him. Baptized into Jesus, you are one with Him and He with you.

And what God has joined together, no man can tear apart.