



MAKING MORE ROOM FOR GOD IN OUR LIVES

The city of Cana is close to Nazareth. Because of today's Gospel, the Latin-rite parish church in Cana is a favorite of many married couples making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The current church was built in the 19th century, on the ruins of a third-century church. There are stone jars to remind pilgrims of the first-century ones that held the water turned into wine. Sometimes today's pilgrims leave posters with the saying popular in Marriage Encounter, "Love is a decision."

In John's Gospel, Jesus works the first "sign" (miracle) of his public ministry during a wedding celebration in Cana. We are struck with God's generosity in turning approximately 90 to 120 gallons of water into wine. But truthfully, we sometimes have mixed feelings about God's generosity because deep down we know that we must eventually become like the God whom we worship. How generous can we be? A generous God can be worshiped properly only by generous people, and that may require some change on our part.

God never runs short. Our first reading from the prophet Isaiah tells us that after the exile in Babylon, God now calls Jerusalem "My delight" and the land of Judah "espoused." After the Babylonian exile, the Scripture writers feel more free to apply marriage imagery to God's relationship with the Jewish people. This carries over into New Testament writings. Jesus provided an enormous amount of wine for the wedding guests at Cana! Later in John's Gospel, Jesus will multiply the loaves and fishes as another of his "signs" (6:1-15). Twelve wicker baskets are needed to hold the leftovers. This detail is in the Gospel for good reason!

Jesus' followers tend to enjoy his generosity but are tempted to shrink back when a similar generosity is asked of them. Today's Gospel tells us that Jesus' disciples began to believe because of the "sign" he performed at Cana. Eventually, the Gospels tell us that people part company with Jesus for various reasons (giving in to family pressure, their desire for wealth, they were seeking a leader to revolt against the Romans, etc.). Most of Jesus' contemporaries leave him because they feel some other path is more secure. Jesus loses people after other "signs" in John's Gospel, especially after he teaches that he is the Bread of Life (6:66-69).

God walks beside us as we learn God's ways. When parents teach children to walk, they protect their little ones from sharp objects and heights, but parents cannot guarantee a life without bumps or bruises. Luckily for us, God does not have a three-strikes-and-you're-out policy. Over time, we learn which decisions draw us closer to God and which ones drive us away. Although the Gospel of John gives us the miracle at Cana, it offers no follow-up on those newlyweds or their guests. How many became Jesus' disciples? For how long? The Gospel of John is about our choices for Jesus, not theirs.

Eventually, saintly people spend more and more time and energy in life-giving ways. For example, what actions and attitudes are more normal for us today than they were 12 months ago? Are we reaching out to estranged family members? Are we more involved in civic or non-profit activities? Are the things that we are doing more frequently normal because they are easier? For some other reason? Are we moving in the right direction concerning Jesus?

The Eucharist, a constant sign of God's generous love, strengthens us to make our love more generous as well-if we fully open ourselves to the grace of this sacrament.