

# Gospel Reflection for Sunday January 16th, 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

By Brian Maher OMI

We are at a huge disadvantage when we read or listen to the Gospels.

Firstly, we come to them with over two thousand years of history behind us. No matter what we think of – science, technology, medicine, communications, media, culture, history, cosmology, and on and on... – we do so with 21<sup>st</sup> Century minds. We can try, but we can never fully enter into the minds and experiences of those who wrote, and first read, the Gospels. Simply accepting this and being open to the reality that what we read cannot simply be transposed to our ears, is for me the first step in understanding the richness of the words we read. To do otherwise is, at best, naïve and if we are not careful leads to a dangerous fundamentalism.

Secondly, we are not in touch with the freshness of the message being shared with those who first read the Gospels. Despite our best efforts, time dims energy and enthusiasm, the ‘newness’ of ideas and concepts become ‘old hat’ as time passes, leading to a “...but we already know that” shrug of the shoulders. Parents and teachers will recognise it in the “...whatever!” roll of the eyes of their teenage children!

Again, simply accepting this allows us, if we try, to recapture something of the vibrancy of the ‘Good News’ being shared with us.

This is true of all of the Gospels but because John’s Gospel was the last one written the fundamental question of ‘who Jesus was’ is becoming clearer and the stories, miracles, parables and encounters of Jesus carry a growing depth of thought and reflection on the significance they had.

Today’s Gospel, what we refer to as ‘the first miracle of Jesus’, is a very good example of this. It is far, far more than the recounting of the miracle of turning water into wine. It is so much more than that, containing a richness lost to us with our 21<sup>st</sup> Century ears but with a vibrancy and importance which made it possible for those who heard it to suffer and die rather than deny it.

Let me share two small examples from this Gospel reading:

John doesn’t use the word ‘miracle’ when describing what Jesus did at this wedding in Cana. Rather, he describes it as a ‘sign’ (“*This was the first of the signs given by Jesus...*”), a word with so much more energy and significance.

You see, a ‘miracle’ is no more than a great and mysterious happening, an event that took place at a wedding in Cana in Galilee, on a particular day and time and was experienced by Jesus, his mother Mary, the servants who filled the jars with water, the steward and bridegroom who first tasted this new wine, and probably most of the guests who were told

that something strange had happened. A 'miracle' happens and is then over. Its significance is left to the hearer to work out.

But a 'sign' is something else entirely. A 'sign' is a happening which points to something else, just as a 'signpost' points to a destination, a place to which we want to go. A 'sign' implies an action, a looking forward, a movement to something more important.

And this is exactly what John intends. The great 'sign' of Jesus, the destination of his entire life, was what happened on Calvary on Good Friday and at the empty tomb on Easter Sunday morning. John is saying to us that everything Jesus did in his life (indeed from the beginning of time itself) 'points to' the Cross and Resurrection.

The miracles, the parables, the words of Jesus, are not, for John, the focus of our attention. They are important only as 'signs', pointing us to Easter Sunday.

What is the significance of this for us?

John seems to be saying, "Let go of your 21<sup>st</sup> Century mindset, put aside your need to analyse everything, and just look at what happened on Easter Sunday morning. You won't be able to 'Google it' or explain it. You must experience it within yourself. Look at the life of Jesus and you will see all of the signposts you might have missed when they happened, but which point to what had to happen – He died for us and rose again from the dead, as he told us would happen."

This is where our energy and hope as Christians come from, and we must never lose sight of it. "look at the signs..." John says to us, "...the signs which point to the resurrection and the 'new' life we have in the Risen Christ, who is *"with us always, even to the end of time."*

John places Mary very much at the centre of this first 'sign' of her son. After this she disappears from his Gospel..... until we meet her again at the foot of the Cross.

She was there, almost bringing about the first sign of Jesus and she is there again at the last and 'Great Sign' of Jesus. Is this accidental? Certainly not! John wants Mary to be with Jesus at the beginning and end of his journey.

When Mary tells Jesus that "they have no wine" his immediate answer always amuses me.

"Woman, why turn to me..." he says. Was he enjoying the wedding himself as a guest, chatting with friends, celebrating with the bride and groom, who he must have known since he was there in the first place?

Suddenly his mother appears, not so subtly suggesting that he does something about the wine crisis. His answer sounds very like, "Ah Mum, what do you want me to do about it? Can I not even enjoy a wedding without you asking me to help out?"

...But then John adds the bit that is important and significant, "...my hour has not yet come..."

This 'hour' is a concept John returns to several times in his Gospel. Later in the Gospel Jesus says, "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*" (12:23) and it refers to the moment of entering into his suffering and death, leading to his resurrection.

As with John's use of the word 'sign', his use of the word 'hour' points us to his 'Greatest Hour' when he dies and rises again from the dead. John is saying to his readers; he is saying to each one of us today, "...The hour that matters, the event that must give meaning to your life, the experience you must constantly come back to, is that which happened on Easter Sunday morning when the glorified Christ rose from the dead."

In our present times of suffering, be they Omicron or climate change or political uncertainty or poverty or illness or death; our hope, our certainty rests in the person of Jesus, in his 'Great Sign', his 'Great Hour', when he died and rose again and is now with us, truly with us, until the end of time.

This is what we must always come back to. This is what we must witness to. This is the 'Good News' we are called to experience within ourselves and then share with others:

"Dying he destroyed our death; Rising he restored our life; Lord Jesus, come in Glory."

Many thanks,

Brian

*If you have any comments, questions or thoughts on this scripture reflection you would like to share, I would be delighted to hear from you – please feel free to email me at [b.maher@oblates.ie](mailto:b.maher@oblates.ie)*