The Luxury Miracle?

That is what some have called today’s Gospel (John 2:11) that concerns Jesus’ supplying a wedding with an abundance of wine. They compare it with our Lord’s healings and ask, “Was it really necessary?” Such superficial judgment shows a misunderstanding of the New Testament miracles in general and this one in particular.

Jesus did not perform his miracles merely in response to illness or trouble—they were always something much more. Taking a cue from the season they were always Epiphanies, i.e., manifestations of who he really was and why he was on this earth. They were always signs of glory and love.

Jesus was not merely trying to save a wedding couple from embarrassment on that fateful day in Cana of Galilee. The miracle of the changing water into wine was a teaching miracle of great significance.

The clue comes in John’s description of the thirty-gallon stone water jars. He tells us they were standing there “for the Jewish rites of purification.” That is not merely a note for us Gentiles; it makes the jars and their contents a symbol of Pharisaic Judaism. That water was useless in the present circumstance. Jesus takes that useless water and turns it into wine “to gladden the human heart” (Psalm 104:15). Jesus is showing those who can see that in such a way will he turn the bland legalism of contemporary religion into the powerful, intoxicating, joyful experience it was meant to be.

How will he do this? Look at the dialogue between Jesus and his mother. Mary tells her son, “They have no wine.” She refers to the bride and groom, while Jesus is seeing the plight of humanity: they do not have a right relationship with the Father, and they cannot do anything about it. Jesus responds, “My hour has not yet come.” “That hour,” of course, refers to Jesus’ crucifixion. That is the how. Jesus turns bland and legalistic religion into a joyful intoxicating experience by his death.

That death is the miracle that bridges the gap between humankind and God and turns the water of time into the wine of eternity. The steward of the feast, like most of us, sees only water turned into wine. But the disciples see this first sign as a revelation of his glory. It is a preface to the life of Grace to be unfolded before them—the life that goes from Cana to Calvary. DLS+