

BIBLICAL PAGES

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**Jesus,
a man of His time and space,
shows us our true and full humanity**

Lectio n° 5 The Bridegroom's joy

Introduction

This Lectio will deal with another aspect of Jesus' person: His joy and happiness. I believe it is of paramount importance to highlight the dimension of joy, as well as of a human affectivity capable of benefiting from one of the fruits of the Spirit quoted by St Paul to the Galatians (Ga 5:22)... This dimension comes to the fore even more in the God-Man, living in perennial communion with the Father in the Holy Spirit (Lk 10:21-22).

The calling to joy, the gift of joy (Mt 5:1-11) is also extremely important for our time, in order to destroy the gloomy image of Christians condemned to live in a "vale of tears". If on one hand it is true that one should not undervalue the difficulties of existence, on the other hand it is also true that happiness can be experienced in this life as well. Happiness is not just the future reward of Heaven; we should then try to perceive what lies behind it, the Holy Spirit inhabiting our hearts, the silent gift which is "a spring of water within, welling up for eternal life". Joy can often be compared to giving birth (Jn 16:21) because sorrow and joy are both part of human life. A 'passover', a paschal event inhabits us and is fulfilled in us, to lead us to that joy welling up from Jesus' good news, from His joy.

Which is Jesus' joy? Where does it stand? In my view it is placed between Heaven and earth, that is, between the joy of the Father (15:7, 32) and the simple joy arising from little events that can be found in the history of each and every man or woman (Mt 13:44; Lk 15:8-10). We have a share in all that He has lived up to as a man. From His affectivity derives man's ability to experience joy. At the same time it is also God's very joy (Ps 104:31; Is 65:19; Zp 3:17), inhabiting the universe and which was made flesh. Thus, Jesus' joy appears in history as joy deriving from friendship, from company, from the relation with the Father, from sponsality... And it is a joy that can be passed on (Jn 17:13b)!

The Bridegroom's joy

Jesus' presence makes people long once again for novelty, an overwhelming joy, drunkenness similar to that coming from wine (Ps 104:15).

All of Jesus' existence is meant to communicate an outpouring love... And St John relates that love is coming to the fore thanks to 'signs', up to the last and definitive one which is the Resurrection.

Here we are approaching the first of Jesus' signs, the archetype, performed at Cana's wedding. And we realize that the outpouring love of God, revealed by Jesus' presence, is expressed by the nuptial covenant. Joy of the nuptial covenant is symbolized by wine (Sg 1:2-4) and, without anybody realizing it, it is over. Jesus' intervention gives a new wine, a new joy that the 'Bridegroom' Himself alone can give. In Him we see the fullness of joy, prefiguring that joy that will be given by the Holy Spirit at the crucifixion. That will be the true Wine coming from the true Vine, a wine making us all drunk of the Spirit. It will be a gift of the pierced Bridegroom, joy for the renewed nuptial covenant. We are approaching Jesus' joy, the joy of making other people rejoice.

Let us invoke the Holy Spirit

God our Father,
we offer You this time of our lives
and we are willing to listen to Your word,
contained in the Holy Scriptures:
pour down Your Holy Spirit into our hearts,
so that we do not resist to Your voice
by a closed and hardened heart,
but we may be able to welcome it in order to cherish it,
meditate upon it and put it into practice.
Through Christ our Lord,
Amen.

1. Lectio

(to read the Word / to listen to it)

John 2:1-12

1 On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. The mother of Jesus was there, 2 and Jesus and His disciples had also been invited. 3 And they ran out of wine, since the wine provided for the feast had all been used, and the mother of Jesus said to Him, 'They have no wine.' 4 Jesus said, 'Woman, what do you want from me? My hour has not come yet.' 5 His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever He tells you.' 6 There were six stone water jars standing there, meant for the ablutions that are customary among the Jews: each could hold twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water,' and they filled them to the brim. 8 Then He said to them, 'Draw some out now and take it to the president of the feast.' 9 They did this; the president tasted the water, and it had turned into wine. Having no idea where it came from – though the servants who had drawn the water knew – the president of the feast called the bridegroom

10 and said, 'Everyone serves good wine first and the worse wine when the guests are well wined; but you have kept the best wine till now.'

11 This was the first of Jesus' signs: it was at Cana in Galilee. He revealed His glory, and His disciples believed in Him. 12 After this He went down to Capernaum with His mother and His brothers and His disciples, but they stayed there only a few days.

This passage is set between the calling of the first disciples (1:35) and Jesus' statement that His body will replace the old temple, and that He will be Himself the new Temple (2:13-22). It is still the beginning of the Gospel, the so-called 'book of signs'. Here St John presents us a sign hinting to a transformation from the old to the new, from water to wine, exactly as we pass from the temple to the Body of Christ.

In Chapter 4 another transformation will be announced: from water of Jacob's Well to a "spring of living water".

The sign we are dealing with is an archetype, that is, a model of all the other signs. Consequently, we can say that the whole Gospel of St John relates of a transformation, from the Old to the New Covenant, from biological life ('bios') to the fullness of life ('zoè'), from the Law to the life of the Spirit, promised and given by Jesus.

The theme that must be highlighted is 'marriage', that can be found in more than one place in the Gospel of St John, and through which the covenant between God and man is revealed, prefigured in the covenant with Moses of the Old Testament (Ex 19:10-11, 16), chosen by God for Israel and reminded by the prophets (Is 54:5; Hos 2:3). Here, in the fourth gospel, Jesus is the Bridegroom recognized by St John the Baptist, the friend who rejoices when he listens to His voice, the Bridegroom to whom alone the Bride belongs (Jn 3:29). We can then understand how in the Cana's wedding the true protagonist is Jesus-The Bridegroom, letting them have a glimpse of His 'hour' beforehand, the 'hour' of the New Covenant in the gift of the Spirit, the goal of His whole spousal existence within mankind.

Let us divide the text into its different parts...

Introduction	2:1-3
The mother / The woman	2:4-5
The transformation	2:6-10
Conclusion	2:11-12

Introduction

1 On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. The mother of Jesus was there, 2 and Jesus and His disciples had also been invited. 3 And they ran out of wine, since the wine provided for the feast had all been used, and the mother of Jesus said to Him, 'They have no wine.'

St John outlines a symbolic week, starting with St John the Baptist's witness about Jesus the Bridegroom (1:27), Whom, with a reference to the Levirate law (Ruth 4:8), he cannot deprive of the spouse's right (he is "not fit to undo the strap of His sandal" 1:27). This is the sixth day, which in the Book of Genesis is the

day of man's creation. Three days have passed since Jesus' meeting with Nathanael, to whom He promised that he would see Heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of Man (1:51), a reference to Jacob's dream.

We can grasp the hints that St John presents in this introduction and say that the 'sign', the event he is going to relate, has to do with the new creation, with the new man, and also with the third day, the day in which the heavens are open and the covenant between Heaven and earth is renewed, and the earth becomes the place of the encounter between God and man. And St John's reader will also get the hint to Jesus' resurrection. In addition to that, the third day is also a reference to God's covenant with Moses on Mt Sinai (Ex 19), that Jewish theology regarded as a second creation: God creating Israel as a people.

Here the setting is Cana of Galilee. 'Cana' means 'to buy'... We are referred to the Book of Exodus 15:16: "The people You have purchased...". God has established a very strong relation with them.

The Mother of Jesus is at Cana. She is not mentioned by name. She is 'the Mother' throughout the gospel. She is present in particular here, where Jesus' 'hour' is prefigured, and under the Cross, when Jesus' 'hour' is fulfilled. A mother is the woman who conceives, gives birth to and raises a son. She belongs to the Old Covenant but, at the same time, is Jesus' link with the New one. With reference to the sixth day of the new creation, she is at the same time Jesus' mother as well as the custodian of the new mankind originating from the new wine given by the Son. And under the cross she is still the mother who welcomes the Son: not only does she become the Mother of the man called Jesus, but she also becomes the mother of the enlarged body of her Son, one and dilated in the Spirit, the Whole Man. Within this Body, one in the Holy Spirit, the Son establishes a relation of reciprocity and belonging between the mother and the beloved disciple, and each and every of Jesus' disciples can have a share in it and in the new community of the covenant, the Church.

Jesus has been invited to Cana's wedding with His disciples. The text makes use of the term 'to call', 'ècléte': there can be no wedding without Jesus, but no wedding without His disciples either, as the blossom of the New People of the Covenant, of the 'ecclesia', of those who have been invited to the wedding.

From being one of the invited – therefore not one of the 'parties' of the Old Covenant marriage – He turns into the Bridegroom of the New Covenant.

The mother / The woman

4 Jesus said, 'Woman, what do you want from me? My hour has not come yet.' 5 His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever He tells you.'

The Mother is part of both the Old Covenant and the New and unbreakable Covenant with Jesus Christ: she represents the faithful Israel who is able to recognise the Messiah; thanks to this relation she is able to realize that "they have no wine", that joy and love are over. She is the faithful Israel, Jahweh's Bride, realizing that the Old Covenant is reaching its end. She is the woman, the Bride

who, by her intervention, prompts the Bridegroom to act. According to the customs of the time, Jesus' answer means: "Woman, wine is none of your business, is it? Neither mine. My hour has not come yet." Jesus calls her "woman", exactly as He will do from the Cross. She is the woman, the bride, of the original covenant between man and woman, and Jesus speaks to her as if her attention to the lack of wine would anticipate something else, something else hidden. But what is Jesus anticipating? The wine of love-making (Song 1:2, 4; 2:4), the overwhelming gift of the Son, the gift of His joy, of the Holy Spirit: the woman / bride under the cross will be part of the New Covenant, and the wedding will be celebrated by the Holy Spirit there and then.

The mother says to the servants ('diaconois): "Do whatever He tells you." This is a reference once again to Exodus (19:8), to the Covenant of the Sinai ("Whatever Jahweh has said, we will do") the mother belongs to, but which she is pushing towards its goal and a new dimension: the Law was given through Moses, grace and truth were given through Jesus Christ. The mother is introducing us to the New Covenant fulfilled by her Son.

The transformation

6 There were six stone water jars standing there, meant for the ablutions that are customary among the Jews: each could hold twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water,' and they filled them to the brim. 8 Then He said to them, 'Draw some out now and take it to the president of the feast.' 9 They did this; the president tasted the water, and it had turned into wine. Having no idea where it came from – though the servants who had drawn the water knew – the president of the feast called the bridegroom 10 and said, 'Everyone serves good wine first and the worse wine when the guests are well wined; but you have kept the best wine till now.'

Six stone water jars were standing there, for the ablutions of the Jews: they are six, a number which is incomplete. They are made of stone, as the tablets of the Law; they are empty, and each can contain 80-100 litres of liquid. Jesus tells the servants to fill them with water. St John adds that they filled them to the brim, 'éos ano'. After filling them to the brim, they had to draw some liquid out and take it to the president of the feast. The reference to "above" occurs in Jn 3:7 and 3:31: in both cases "above" means "God". "You must be born from above" (3:7) is parallel to "to be born of the Spirit" (3:8); "He who comes from above" is parallel to "He who comes from Heaven" (3:31). In our case, the jars filled to the brim, up to their upper part, hint to the fact that their content is nearly overwhelming, but it is imperfect, given that it does not get into the divine. We can say that the Law, and the ritual ablutions customary among the Jews, are limited. They must be turned into a lively and joyful relation coming from God, coming from above.

In the Old Testament, wine is a symbol of all the gifts of God, as well as of consolation and joy (Ps 104:15; Is 5:12; 22:13; 24:11), the symbol of exultation in the times of the Messiah (Am 9:13-14; Jr 31:12), therefore, an eschatological sign (Is 25:8). Isaiah links it to life and love in 16:10. The Song of Songs highlights

drunkenness as a symbol of nuptial love (2:4), as does Is 62:5-8, 9; and Hosea 2:21-24. Water is transformed into wine when it is drawn out: the jars filled with water cannot produce joy and love in themselves. All those who have in mind the old ritual do not know where the wine comes from; on the contrary, the servants who have filled the jars know everything. The president of the feast is unable to understand the reason why an excellent and abundant wine has been served at the end of the feast, which presumably could last for several days. He does not know where that wine came from. In St John's Gospel, the phrase 'where it comes from' is linked to the mystery of Christ in relation to the Father (8:14), and to those who are born of the Spirit: like the wind, "you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going" (3:8).

Those who obeyed Jesus' order and who did all that He had told them to do, who filled the jars and who drew out the liquid from them, knew everything: they were involved in the mystery of revelation of His glory, they were the servants of that joy which Jesus owned in its fullness and that He wanted to share with us.

Conclusion

11 This was the first of Jesus' signs: it was at Cana in Galilee. He revealed His glory, and His disciples believed in Him. 12 After this He went down to Capernaum with His mother and His brothers and His disciples, but they stayed there only a few days.

At Cana Jesus revealed His glory. This is the model of all the signs: there is in it a reference to the Cross, given that the glory is always linked to it. The cross reveals in its fullness the mutual love of Father and Son, both as a reciprocal relation and as a relation between Them and mankind.

It may seem paradoxical that the joy of spousal love, to be lived in the drunkenness of the Spirit, explicitly refers to the Cross. In the gift of the excellent and superabundant wine Jesus manifests His glory as a proclamation of the New Covenant: Cana is a sign of the new wedding that will take place on the day of the New Creation, ie on the day of the Resurrection. The new couple will be made up of Jesus and Mary of Magdala, the symbol of the purified and redeemed bride (as the adulterous mankind), made beautiful by her relation with the Bridegroom, calling her by name.

2. Meditatio

(to meditate on the Word / to let it resound)

Which joy do we welcome from the Bridegroom? Which joy do we treasure in our hearts, like Mary? Which joy do we transmit to others?

These three issues have a common thread, which was the goal of Christ's existence: the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Do we regard the nuptial joy, the eternal plan of the Father for man, as a personal calling to us? Is it for us the sign of the Holy Spirit 'marrying' us to the Bridegroom?

In the light of n° 8 of our Rule of Life, which is the relation between love and joy, for us as women? Which depth has Jesus' joy in me? If it is not a paschal joy, implying a transformation, carrying the sign of giving birth to life, the sign of love overwhelming all limits, is it truly Jesus' joy, that joy of making other people's share in His love, which is one of the features of His humanity?

Please read the following passage by Alberto Neglia:

According to a rabbinical saying, God comes down to the earth in order to find a bride for Himself. God marries us and the image of the wedding feast is very relevant in Jesus' preaching too ("The Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who gave a feast for his son's wedding...", Mt 22:1ff). In Jn 3:29, St John the Baptist's words are related: "the bridegroom's friend... is filled with joy at the bridegroom's voice". St John the Baptist has already experienced the exultation of God who has found His bride, the same joy of God who, in spite of living in the infinite fullness of life and glory, wanted to share His life with man, "delighting to be with the children of men" (Pr 8:31). Because of that event the liturgy of the early Church sang: "This is the time for the marriage of the Lamb, His bride is ready" (Rv 19:7). This is the cry of exultance of the bride, and also the proclamation of the Gospel: the Kingdom of God is at hand, the Lamb has come to marry us.

... and another one by Fr Giorgio Mazzanti:

The whole history of revelation is focussed on the theme-reality of God's marriage with man... The nuptial symbol is like the soul of the Old Testament concept of time, during which the 'Ecclesia praeformatio' ('pre-forming of the Church') – as St Hilary calls it – took place, the making of the Bride for whom – as Origen says – Christ the Bridegroom left His Father... At Cana Christ turned water into wine. Now, wine has always been regarded as the sign of drunkenness. And here at Cana the wine of the nuptial drunkenness comes to give joy to the wedding feast.

At Pentecost, after receiving the Holy Spirit, the apostles were regarded as drunk. The true reason why the apostles were 'drunk' was that they had received the Holy Spirit, the new and true wine of human-spiritual drunkenness. That wine at Cana was just the type and pre-figuration of the wine of the Holy Spirit given out at the feast of God's wedding with humankind... The Fathers realized that wine, the Holy Spirit, the wedding feast, Pentecost and the wedding feast of the eternal marriage were all linked together. The Holy Spirit appears to be the one who makes possible and celebrates the wedding between God and humankind. He is the true symbol of marriage, the true 'paranymph' of the marriage between God and men in Christ...

3. Oratio **(to pray the Word / to repeat it)**

Lord Jesus Christ,
we thank You for the gift of Your presence,
for Your Bridegroom tenderness
by which You bend down on our pettiness and formalism,
in order to help us understand
that You have given us an example
of love pleasing to Your Father.

Praise to You, Lord,
because those who are entrusting themselves to You
can experience both the security of Your grace
and the insecurity making us humble,
not self-reliant.

By listening to Your Word,
may we learn to long for Your Kingdom
and to rejoice even now
for all that You have prepared for us.
Help us become brothers and sisters
and to proclaim to all that You are the Saviour,
the Bridegroom of humankind,
called to enter the feast of Your life
with the Father in the Spirit.
You, who live and reign for ever and ever.
Amen.

4. Contemplatio **(to contemplate the Word / silence)**

Immersed in Jesus' life, let us be reached by His joy, especially when our existence seems to become dull and tasteless. We wish to be won over by the drunkenness of the wine given to us as a gift... Let us appreciate the beauty of the Father's will, calling us to the nuptial communion.

5. Collatio **(to share the Word)**

Let us share that Word of Jesus that gives new life to us as well as joy.