

Bishop's Reflection

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)

Isaiah was born in the twilight of Jerusalem's glory and became a witness to its degradation and downfall. He mourns the absence of justice and mercy, and cries out on behalf of the downtrodden and those who are left destitute by the carelessness of the rich and the powerful. He goes as far as to name his own children "Forsaken" and "Desolate", abandoned by God. In time, he will see his nation led into exile, as it falls to the mighty power of Babylon and her princes.

It is, therefore, quite surprising that Isaiah brings the news of the long-awaited one, prophetic utterances of both comfort and joy that we delight in during most of the Advent and Christmas Seasons. Despite being a witness to his people's slow descent into darkness, Isaiah is universally known as the prophet of light and of hope, never quite giving in to the pessimism, cynicism or despair of his day, choosing instead to trust in God, whose goodness and mercy endures forever.

In today's First Reading, a small remnant of the tribe of Judah, henceforth known as Jews, have returned to Jerusalem from their seventy-year exile in Babylon. They find their beloved city in ruins, their temple crushed to the ground. Here Isaiah's voice becomes one of consolation as he speaks of the vindication of Jerusalem in the sight of the nations. No longer "Desolate" or "Forsaken", a reference to his aforementioned children, but as God's delight, Isaiah speaks of a marriage, a wedding, in which God will rejoice over Jerusalem, as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride.

Isaiah's image of a wedding and a marital covenant, between God and his people, is an ancient one. John picks up on this image in today's Gospel, which takes place in Cana of Galilee and includes Mary, but also Jesus and his disciples. On closer study of the narrative, it contains multiple references to the covenant bond God established with his people on Mt. Sinai.

The account begins with a reference to "On the third day". Though Christians associate the third day with the resurrection, Jewish readers would make an even stronger association with the third day after the people arrived at Mt. Sinai, when Moses was commanded to go up the mountain to enter into a covenantal relationship with God. There he received the Ten Commandments, a visible sign of the marital covenant between God and His people. It was there that the people cried out, "Whatever the Lord commands, we will do." A sentiment Mary echoes in her words to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

The wedding at Cana turns out to be no ordinary wedding. Though at first it seems as if Mary, Jesus and his disciples are there as invited guests, at the end, the Steward is criticizing the groom – a criticism that is being levelled at God Himself, "Everyone serves the good wine first, but you have kept the good wine until now." It is as if Jesus goes from invited guest, to the one who saves the wedding from disaster, by taking the water used for the observation of the Old Law and changing it into the very best wine of the New Covenant, to the one who is being criticized.

Mary is cast as the great intercessor, serving the role of the Queen-Mother of the Old Testament. Not only does she plead to her son on our behalf, but she also instructs us to, "Do whatever he tells you." Do we recognize in Jesus the bridegroom knocking at our door? Do we know him as our one true love? The wedding at Cana is the first of many great signs Jesus will perform in John's Gospel so that, we, too, may encounter our Lord and bridegroom, and in knowing him, to enter into a new relationship with God.