

**November 21, 2010**  
First Sunday of Advent

### **Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings**

The miracle at Cana, narrated in a story unique to John (2: 1-11), apparently took place shortly after Jesus' forty-day fast in the wilderness. About that time and---it would seem---subsequent to the arrest of John the Baptist, "Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom" (Mark 1:14; cf. Matthew 4:12; Luke 4:14). One of the villages in Galilee was Cana.

Although the sequence in John's early chapters is notoriously difficult to accommodate to the chronology of the other gospels, he does indicate that Jesus visited Cana *after* the calling of the first disciples (1:35-51; 2:2; Mark 1:16-20) and *prior to* the larger ministry at Capernaum (2:12; cf. Mark 1:21; Luke 4:23).

The circumstances of Jesus' visit are not too difficult to imagine: Traveling north, He arrived first at His mother's home at Nazareth, nine miles south of Cana, accompanied by His earliest followers. One of these was Nathaniel, a man who actually hailed from Cana (John (21:2)).

Although now and then a regional rivalry between Nazareth and Cana prompted the citizens of one village to disparage the merits of the other (1:46), we are probably right to think such banter benign. The two places were doubtless linked---along with neighboring Bethsaida (1:41-45)---by numerous friendships, and we know that Jesus visited Cana more than once (4:46).

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Mary was invited to a wedding in that village. Indeed, John begins his story by noting her presence there (2:1). Nor is it extravagant to imagine she may have gone to Cana early in order to assist with the preparations.

At least, this would reasonably explain why John separates her presence there from the invitation extended to Jesus and His disciples. More than one reader has gained the impression that Jesus and His friends, newly arrived at Nazareth, may have been something of an afterthought on the Cana guest list. In turn, this sudden influx of extra visitors may explain why, during the course of the celebration, the wine ran short!

If---as I guess---Mary assisted in the wedding preparations, it is not surprising that she, it was, who noticed the wine shortage. Indeed, during the several days of feasting, this helpful wedding guest may occasionally have cast a wary eye at the beverage supply, growing a tad alarmed at its steady decline. At last

it was gone, and Mary determined to speak with her son.

What prompted the mother of Jesus to take this step? What did she expect? John does not say, and Mary's actual expectation remains one of the real mysteries of the story.

This does not mean, however, that we are totally at sea on the matter. We do know the substance of a message Mary received from an angel more than thirty years earlier: "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest . . . therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:31-32,35). Moreover, the birth and infant life of Jesus were attended by extraordinary circumstances (1:8-18,25-38; Matthew 2:1-15). In addition, Mary had heard her son---from tender years---speak of God as "My Father" (2:49).

How, then, did Mary understand all these things? It is not at all clear to me that she *did* understand. At least, it would be silly to suppose that she thought of Jesus in formal creedal terms that the Christian Church would elaborate---not till centuries later---in conciliar deliberations.

Mary's knowledge of Jesus was not of this dogmatic sort. It was, first of all, a mother's knowledge of her child, especially a child who had lived with her well into adulthood. There was surely more, as well: It would be wrong to imagine that when the Holy Spirit, "the power of the Highest," descended upon her to effect the conception of Jesus, the Spirit intended this descent as a transitory visit.

Mary was not just a temporary, purely physical conduit of the Incarnation. There was a transpersonal relationship that transcended biology. She was truly the *mother* of God's Son. When, during her pregnancy, she declared, "He who is mighty has done great things for me" (Luke 1:49), she was aware of at least this much. Day by day she measured, and now continued to measure, what this meant. If, then, she knew Jesus at all---if being the mother of God's Son meant *anything*---it certainly meant she was entitled to speak to Him about a shortage of wine.

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