

III Epiphany 2021

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Romans 12.16-21 St. John 2.1-11

Hymns 53 & 54 (Hymnal 1940)

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The hymns we sing during the Church Year are powerful teaching tools. This is especially true during the first half of the Church Year. From Advent to Pentecost...we are drawn into the specific events in the life of Jesus and the Early Church.

Throughout the Epiphany Season the Gospels talk about the various ways Jesus shows himself to the World. Today is the Third and Last Sunday after the Epiphany for this year. Next Sunday is Septuagesima and the beginning of the Pre-Lenten Season.

Both of the hymns we are singing today are fitting good-byes to the Epiphany Season. The Opening Hymn, *Songs of thankfulness and praise*, condenses the entire Epiphany Season into one short hymn. The second verse invites us to be guests at a Wedding Banquet in Cana.

Wedding Banquets are big events even today. In Jesus' time they lasted many days. Guests would have traveled long distances to celebrate with family and friends. There would have been plenty of food...and wine. When Mary realizes the wine has run out...she informs Jesus. The event planner would have been embarrassed to find out he hadn't ordered enough wine.

Jesus' reply in the KJV, "Woman, what have I to do with thee," can be translated as, "You must not tell me what to do." Jesus is not being rude to his mother...he is using common everyday speech...and is really saying, "Yes, Mom, I know, I have things under control." Mary gets the message and instructs the table servers to do as Jesus says.

They fill six 30-gallon jars with water and take the water...now turned into wine...to the wedding planner. He is surprised to find out it is the "best" wine he's ever tasted...better than the Ripple wine served earlier.

What do we learn from our being guests at the Wedding Banquet? First...Jesus approves of Marriage and Wedding Feasts. He made certain there was more wine so the guests could continue celebrating. Second, Jesus

changed water into wine. God has power over nature. God can change water into wine. Jesus shows himself to be God. Third...this was Jesus' first public miracle...in Gentile territory...for the whole world to see.

In the closing verse to this hymn we ask God to give us his grace..."mirrored in his holy word"...so we may imitate him in our own lives now...and be made pure...so we may praise him at the Lord's Great Epiphany in heaven.

Saint Paul gives us some guidance in the Epistle how we can imitate Jesus: We need to be humble; we shouldn't think of ourselves as better than everyone else; we should try to live in peace with everyone; we should never take revenge on someone...let God do it; we should be as nice as we can to those who have hurt us...they will burn with shame; we must not let evil defeat us...we must conquer it with good.

This brings us to our Closing Hymn, *Alleluia, song of gladness*. On this Third and Last Sunday after the Epiphany, we say good-bye to the Alleluia. We will not hear or say Alleluia during the Mass throughout the Pre-Lenten and Lenten seasons. We will not sing Alleluia again...until Easter.

The words of the Closing Hymn are rich: the choirs of Angels sing Alleluia...their voices can never be silenced. We long to be at the Great Wedding Banquet in Jerusalem...a metaphor for our true home in heaven. But for now we wander our temporary home on Earth...like the Israelites who wandered by Babylon's sad waters...until they made it to the Promised Land.

Because of our many transgressions...the hymn tells us...we don't even deserve to sing Alleluia. But the holy time of Lent is coming...and we can turn to God and ask for his help and that of his Angels and Saints to turn away from sin...and begin the journey home to God.

Epiphany is about the appearances Jesus makes to the World. We ask the Holy Trinity to grant us at the last day to keep Easter...our Lord's Great Epiphany...in the poetic words of the hymn "in our home beyond the sky"...where we will forever sing Alleluia joyfully.

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