

A professor was teaching a computer course at a Community College. After several weeks of teaching, he decided to do a learning activity and divided the men and women into 2 groups by their gender. They were to determine what gender computers ought to be. After about 15 minutes, he asked the men to present their findings. They were unanimous – computers must be feminine in gender. And they presented their reasons.

1. No one but their creator understands their internal logic
2. When computers communicate with one another – they speak in code language that only they and experts can understand.
3. Every mistake you make is stored on their hard drive for later retrieval
4. As soon as you commit to 1, you spend half your paycheck accessorizing it.

But the women unanimously proposed that computers must be masculine in gender. And they presented their reasons.

1. In order to get their attention, you have to turn them on.
2. They have a lot of data – but are unable to think for themselves.
3. They are supposed to help you solve problems – but half the time they ARE the problem.
4. As soon as you commit to one, you realize if you had waited a little longer you could have gotten a better model. (Sent via email)

Those of you who are astute about the readings/feasts of the last three Sundays may note that they are ALL about Epiphanies. We celebrated the feast of the Epiphany 3 weeks ago, then the Baptism of the Lord, where it was manifested that Jesus was God's beloved Son with whom God is well pleased, and today, further, the epiphany of Jesus as the fulfillment of the final age – a time when there will be an abundance of wine. So let's dig into this rich, rich gospel text. The miracle of Cana seems at first sight to be out of step with the other signs that Jesus performs. What are we supposed to make of the fact that Jesus produces a huge surplus of wine – about 520 liters – for a private party? Obviously there is a lot more going on here than initially meets the eye. The first important clue is the timing. "On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee." (Jn 2:1). It is not clear what previous date this 'third day' is related to – which shows all the more plainly that what matters to the Evangelist is precisely the symbolic time reference, which he gives us as a key to understanding the event.

In the Old Testament, the 3rd day is the time for theophany – a manifestation of God – which is also an EPIPHANY – a manifestation! We go back to Exodus 19 (16-18), where in the meeting between God and Israel on Sinai we read: "On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings....the Lord descended upon it in fire." At the same time what we have here is a prefiguring of history's final and decisive epiphany/theophany: the Resurrection of Christ on the third day, when God's former encounters with humankind become His definitive irruption upon earth, when the earth is torn open once and for all and drawn into God's own life. What John is hinting at here, then, is that at Cana God first reveals Himself in a way that carries forward the events of the Old Testament, all of which have the character of a promise and are now straining toward their definitive fulfillment. Scholars have reckoned up the number of the preceding days in John's Gospel that are taken up with the calling of the disciples (e.g., Barrett, GOSPEL, p. 190). The conclusion is that this 'third day' would be the 6th or 7th day since Jesus began calling His disciples. So this 'third day' reference is symbolic – it is reminding us that on the third day – creation is perfected in Christ's resurrection.

There is another basic element of the narrative linked to this timing. Jesus tells Mary that His hour has not yet come. On an immediate level, this means that He does not simply act and decide by His own lights, but always in harmony with the Father's will and always in terms of the Father's plan. More particularly, the 'hour' designates His 'glorification,' which brings together His Cross, His resurrection, and His presence throughout the world in word and sacrament. Jesus's hour, the hour of His 'glory,' begins at the moment of the Cross, and its historical setting in John's gospel is the exact moment when the Passover lambs are slaughtered for the Paschal meal. It is at that very moment that Jesus, the true lamb, pours out His blood. His hour comes from God, but it is solidly situated in a precise historical context tied to a liturgical date – and just so it is the beginning of the new liturgy in 'spirit and truth,' another phrase that we will hear in this Gospel of John. When at this juncture Jesus speaks to Mary of His hour, He is connecting the present moment with the mystery of the Cross interpreted as His glorification. This hour is not yet come; that was the first thing that had to be said. And yet Jesus has the power to anticipate this 'hour' in a mysterious sign. This stamps the miracle of Cana as an anticipation of the hour, tying the two together intrinsically.

And there is a tie-in with the Eucharist. Just as at His mother's request Jesus gives a sign that anticipates His hour, so too He does the same thing every time we celebrate the Eucharist. Here, in response to the Church's prayer, the Lord anticipates His return; He comes already now when we receive Him in His Body and Blood – He celebrates the marriage feast with us here and now. In so doing, He lifts us out of our own time toward the coming 'hour.'

And we begin to understand the event of Cana. The sign of God is overflowing generosity. We see it in the multiplication of the loaves; we see it again and again – most of all, though, at the center of salvation history, in the fact that He lavishly spends Himself for us by giving Himself, His very life, on the cross for us. This abundant giving is His 'glory.' The superabundance of Cana is therefore a sign that God's feast with humanity, His self-giving for us, has begun. The framework of the event, the wedding, thus becomes an image that points beyond itself to the messianic hour: The hour of God's marriage feast with His people has begun in the coming of Jesus. The promise of the last days enters into the now.

This links the story of Cana with Saint Mark's account of the question posed to Jesus by the disciples of John the Baptist and the Pharisees: Why don't your disciples fast? Jesus answers: "can the wedding guests fast as long as the bridegroom is among them?" (Mk 2:18ff) Jesus identifies Himself with His people, and by doing so, He mysteriously places His own existence, Himself, within the mystery of God. In Him, in an unexpected way, God and humankind become one, become a 'marriage,' though this marriage – as Jesus subsequently points out – passes through the Cross, through the 'taking away' of the bridegroom. (adapted from Joseph Ratzinger, JESUS OF NAZARETH, pages not noted)

OK, I realize that may be a bit heavy – but it's so wonderful I want you to appreciate how rich these texts are! So second, this story can serve as a great metaphor for our lives. For at some point, in all of our lives, the wine runs out. By definition, life – without exceptions – is an experience in which we discover that the wine always runs out. Wine can run out of a marriage or a career. Wine can run out of a business or a hobby. Wine can run out of a friendship. Wine can even run out of a church commitment or some civic connection. We can count on it. In every life, the wine always runs out.

How does this happen? Well, for one, the wine runs out because of the exhaustion of activity. We find ourselves busy with the routines of life – education, marriage, career, family, hobbies, friendships – only to discover, to our surprise, that the wine has run out of most, if not all, of them. Other times, the wine runs out from neglect. We take all the 'goody' out of life and put nothing back in. We fail to pray, to come to Mass and connect with the Great Wine/Miracle Maker, to give, to serve, only to learn as the wedding of our life winds

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down, that we have taken more than we have given, used more than we have replenished, destroyed more than we have created.

Why is this so? Because life's first wine is easy, plentiful, even cheap. The first wine of life is the wine we drink from our intelligence, our charm, our youth, our connections, perhaps our looks. The first wine comes easy. If we have a good mind and some drive inside, that first wine can be very rewarding. It is cheap, but very rewarding. It's fun. It doesn't cost us a whole lot. We just do life out of that young wine and it works well for a while. But soon, all too soon, the wine runs out. And when that happens, what do we do?

For one, we look around the wedding that is our life to see if Jesus is there. Though we may have ignored Him, even avoided Him for some time, look around – we will see Him. Truth be told, if we don't have the Divine Guest at our wedding that can turn water into wine, we have a big problem. We would be wise to tell Him the wine has run out. Admit to the Christ, "I have no wine. Life has lost its joy, its meaning, its vitality." Confession is not only good for the soul; it is a major door to soul transformation. We have to admit that the wine is gone.

Third, we need to ask Jesus to transform the water of our life into wine. And here is another interesting textual tidbit. After the jars have been filled to the brim, Jesus says, "Now draw and serve to the steward of the feast." We do not have words in the English language to distinguish the drawing of water, but in Biblical language, there is a distinction. The word that Jesus used in the command, "Now draw," is the Greek verb that means uniquely to draw from a well. We'll hear another story in this gospel about Jesus at a well – and the Samaritan woman will draw from Jesus – the water that springs up to eternal life. We can always go to the well of grace – for with Christ, there is no shortage, the water of His love knows no limit. We can always invite Him into to transform our water into wine. We might ask "how is this possible?" From our own personal lives – and the record of God's activity with humankind down through the centuries, everyone who draws from the well of God's grace, and drinks this new wine, says it is unlike any other.

And here is the best news of all: as in the story from Gospel of John, God always saves the best wine till last. In God's grace, in the wedding that is life itself, there are no 'has beens' or 'also-rans.' None of us have gone too far away. Actually, when we think about it, we probably haven't gone far enough. We haven't gone all the way to the well of God's grace where water becomes wine. Do we think the best days are behind us? Think again. God's best wine is yet to be served. No matter how old we are.

In life, the wine always runs out. Where are we today? Mid-life? Mid-career? Mid-marriage? Mid-something? Hear the good news. Go to the well and draw out this new wine, this best wine, this good gift from God. Amen. (Author not specified, GRACEWORKS, Jan 14, 2017)