

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Jan 20th 2013

Woosh, there they go! We have little bugging problems which do not get flicked away that easily. We wish we could whoosh a prayerful hand at them and send them up to heaven where God can deal with them. I might spend some time inventing a "bug-em" zapper or a battery-operated prayer-flicker and we could just turn it on and then everything is better.

Until that happy day, we have the unhappiness of bothersome mosquito-like realities through which we walk toward the Eucharist and back to which the Eucharist sends us. We prepare to join the other bugged believers who gather to be comforted, but not necessarily relieved from all their itches.

REFLECTION

In today's First Reading we hear verses from a short-chapter poem about the city of Jerusalem. It appears as if the copy editor of the Book of Consolation, (chapters 40-55) picked this poem off the Editorial Room floor, read it and decided at least it should go somewhere. Here it is at the end of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. It is comforting, and uses a marital theme for emphasis.

Zion, Jerusalem, was occupied by non believers who polluted the holy temple and desecrated all that was of the Jewish religious traditions. It was as if the city was a spinster or orphan, not belonging any more to God or God's people, the Jews. The love poem is a prophetic foretelling of the future embrace of God once again and they will be called by a new relational name. The city and the people of Israel had been called by dishonoring names by former prophets, but now their names are changed, as do some marrying people change their names. No longer that, but a new this. It is a poem about redemption and the Groom, God is taking as bride all that once was disgraceful and abandoned.

John's Gospel does not present many miracles in its pages. There are three physical healings and two physical changing's. There is the multiplication of the loaves and fish, and this changing of water into

wine about which we read in today's liturgy. These are "signs" or revelations pointing toward Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. They are offered to those who can see these signs in hopes that they will come to believe in Him.

In John's Gospel there are often literary references back to the Book of Genesis. Both this Gospel and Genesis start with, "In the beginning." The first day of creation was the act of God's hovering over the "water", or chaos (Gen. 1, 2). God said, "Let there be light" and so there was and God called that "day" and the dark God called "night". In John's Gospel the good things happen in the light of day and the bad things take place in the dark.

For John, Jesus is Light and as John writes in his first chapter, "This Light was the life of the world."

There are six water jars here in this reading and there were six days of creation in Genesis. The water of chaos or the unformed, is changed by the Word of God into seeable light and the water in the stone jugs is to be seen through the light of Jesus; making it a sign. The signs are to be seen and taken as lights shining on Jesus as Messiah.

This is the opening, or first day of the new creation. The wine-masters indicate that this new wine is more of a sign than the earlier one. For John, Jesus is the later wine which completes the wedding feast begun with the first serving of wine, or the original creation of the universe. This of course, includes our human creation.

The disciples begin to accept Jesus as son of God. The real miracle is their acceptance of themselves as changed-into-new-wine people. This miracle continues taking place in our own lives as well. God continues breathing over our chaos, our unformedness, our darkness and bringing us into the light, through the Light that is Jesus.

We are just at the beginning of the Liturgical Year. We, like the disciples, are always coming slowly into the light of our being newly created through Christ's birth, life, death and Resurrection. Through the accounts of Genesis' creation stories, God comes out of hiding, just enough to allow us the freedom to say "yes", there is a Person of Beyondness whose love does such things as giving us signs which we can accept, ignore or reject as mere possibilities or accidentals.

Our mother, each year, made a Christmas Cranberry Pudding, a steamed moist cake upon which she would pour a sweet and hot mixture of sugar, whipping cream, butter and vanilla - the four major food groups for sure. My first Christmas away from my family of origin, in the Jesuit Novitiate, my mother sent a medium-sized jar of this sauce as a post-Christmas gift and reminder. It was in the refrigerator and appeared to the person who threw it away as if it were lard or two-week old gravy. Now there's a homily in there somewhere. Jerusalem, the people of God, the jugs of water, our old human condition, things which can appear throw-awayable are still so precious to the Mother God who keeps sending us the new four major food groups, Jesus, the Sacraments, our personal selves and those to whom God sends us to nourish and through whom to be nourished. O, yes, I know who threw that treasure away and he is not allowed to forget it either. Jesus is still changing my old water into new wine.

“You have prepared a table before me, and how precious is the chalice that quenches my thirst.”

Larry Gillick, S.J.