**SECOND SUNDAY OF THE YEAR C**

**16th January 2022**

**First Reading Isaiah 62:1-5**

Chapters 56–66 of the Book called ‘Isaiah’ come from a collection of oracles which probably date from after 538 BC. (The rebuilding of the Temple mentioned in 66;1-4 took place in 520 B.C.) An anonymous prophet wrote the poem we have just read when the walls of the holy city were still piles of rubble. The houses would be even less than that.

The city's plight reflected that of God's people, once God's wife. (Hosea 2:1-13) She had become a barren wife, or a widow bereft of her children (Isaiah 54:1-9). But her husband, the Lord, was faithful to his promises and would again rejoice over his bride. He was the God of the covenant, faithful and forgiving. Inspired by such faith, the poet must sing of Zion, the new Jerusalem, and her future glory, a new city to bear a new name.

The new names 'My Delight in Her' and 'The Married', will express the new joyful relationship. There will be another wedding-feast for God and Zion. Christians see this symbolized by the wedding at Cana (Gospel reading) and by the feast after the final judgement. The Lord is the bridegroom who changes the plain wholesome water of Jewish religion into the new richer wine of Christianity. While this reading comes from a section appropriate for any festival season, it is clearly intended to link with the gospel, for it uses nuptial imagery to depict the relationship between Yahweh and Israel—a familiar tradition since Hosea.

**Responsorial Psalm: 96:1-3, 7-8a, 9-10**

The first two stanzas of this psalm are used each year at the midnight Mass of Christmas, and practically the same selection of verses is used in a slightly different arrangement on the twenty-ninth Sunday of the year in series A. As well as being a psalm generally suitable for festivals, it has a strong missionary note, brought out here by the refrain “Proclaim his marvellous deeds to all the nations”

**Second Reading I Corinthians 12:4-I1**

In chapters 12-14 Paul addresses a final question raised in the Corinthians' letter to him. It concerned the 'charisms' or spiritual gifts granted to the community. Some but not all in the congregation had adopted the habit of ecstatic prayer uttered as if in a trancelike semi-conscious state. In such prayer, they seemed to be under the control of the Holy Spirit. They claimed that this practice made them more gifted than the others, amongst whom they included Paul. They also assumed that their gifts were for their own personal gratification rather than the benefit of the whole church.

The whole section 12:4-14:40 is devoted to the relative merits of the spiritual gifts. The significant and - no doubt, for his readers, disturbing point of Paul’s analysis is his insistence that not only is there a variety of gifts, but that there is a variety of service; that the gifts are, essentially, gifts of service.

It is not likely that the Corinthians had regarded them in this light. Paul (12:4¬11) begins by pointing out that the gifts of the Spirit are far more varied than the Corinthians had imagined. The Corinthians are assured that their profession of faith, *'Jesus is Lord*' comes from God's Spirit and only from that source (12:3).

The same Spirit, too, is the source of all spiritual gifts. These are classified 'gifts,' 'services,' and 'works' (vv. 4-6). As gifts they are attributed to the Spirit, who is the gift, sent by the Lord Jesus and the Father. As services or ministries they are attributed to the Lord Jesus who came among us not to be served but to serve. As works they are attributed to the Father, the source of all being and activity.

In the last analysis the charisms are, firmly, the gift of God, imparted through the Spirit; and the Spirit is none other than the risen Lord considered as present and at work in the community.

It becomes abundantly clear, in chapters 12-14, that Christian endowments are truly such only if they edify, build up. Behind these specifically Christian gifts stand Spirit, Lord, and God; the gifts are, impressively, of divine provenance. The divine activity is never dissipated but is necessarily unified. There is, then, unity in the diversity of charisms, for all come from the same Holy Spirit, and are destined for the building up, the edification, of the community.

**Gospel John 2:l-12**

A crossword compiler will deliberately hide clues for the solver to recognise without being explicit. John does this many times thus providing enough material to furnish the careers of many New Testament scholars.

One example occurs in our story to-day. The word ‘semeion’ is translated ‘sign’ in our reading and is often translated ‘miracle’ elsewhere. The word simply means ‘an astonishing thing’ but not necessarily a supernatural one.

Now, John says, ‘This was the first semeion .......’ naturally suggesting that there is more than one. The word also suggests that some people but not all, have the insights necessary to recognise them. Indeed, in Chapter 4;54 he mentions a ‘second sign’ after which we are on our own. Scholars generally find that there are seven in all, seven being considered a complete number. The signs subtly increase both in difficulty and in importance the seventh being the Resurrection of Jesus himself.

Sign 1 Marriage at Cana (2:1-12)

Sign 2 The Official’s son 4;46-54

Sign 3 Paralysed Man at Bethesda 5;1-18

Sign 4 The feeding of the five thousand (6:1-15)

Sign 5 Blind man given sight (9)

Sign 6 Raising of Lazarus (11:1-44)

Sign 7 Resurrection (20:1-18)

It is always helpful to ask the question, ‘What did John’s readers think when they read these stories?’ for they were written for them and not us. As far as the Marriage story is concerned, I think, when they read of water and rites of purification, they would have quickly recalled Baptism and birth and life. And when they read of wine, they would have thought of the Eucharist, and the Blood which was a sign of the life they received at it. And they would have realised that the first is the doorway to the second. They would also have been aware that the Wedding feast, like the Eucharist was a picture of God presiding at the heavenly banquet for which Christians have been given tickets.

In the first century, there were very few writings that we would call ‘biography’ They were mostly strongly biased eulogies. So the Synoptic Gospels must not be thought of as being objective or dispassionate. They were written for convinced and practising second generation Christians to give them facts and grounds for their faith.

John is at a further remove again, drawing out in profound reflection the implications of all that had happened. John’s intention through his Gospel is to build up the revealing of the Glory of God in his Son on earth, climaxing in the Crucifixion. The significance of the wine in this scheme is that it comes through the work of Jesus and points to him. As his gift, the wine is, significantly, given at the end. It is the eschatological gift of the Messiah.

Epiphanies reveal Jesus himself. It is important to note that Jesus' initially postponed granting his Mother’s request, because his *'hour has not yet come'* - the hour of the passion, which is the hour of the glorification of Jesus. The lesson is that the event of revelation is independent of human desire or manipulation. It comes to pass where and how God wills - and then it surpasses all human expectation.

All signs are ‘epiphanies’ and all can only be ‘understood’ by those with faith. This is also true of much of the detail within the stories, as for example, John’s use of the word ‘hour’

Like the ‘signs’ the ideas contained in the word ‘hour’ can be traced through the Gospel like beads on a necklace. In each instance, the ideas are blended with other Johannine themes, coming together in the climax of the Crucifixion. But the hour itself cannot be advanced or retarded. Repeatedly postponed throughout his ministry, it finally dawns with the beginning of what we call Holy Week. (John 12;23)

The 'hour' cannot be manipulated and yet the 'sign' in response to Mary's request already symbolizes it: 'Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory.'

Standing thus at the beginning of his work, and at the end when it is complete, Mary is associated with the whole of it. His mother is the only person who has been present, in the wings, from his Nativity to his Ascension.