

After 4 weeks of Advent, and 3 weeks of Christmas, we're back in Ordinary Time today, and the Church begins this new season with a rather interesting selection of readings – readings with a very clear wedding theme. Why would the Church do this? Why does the Church want us to think about marriage at the beginning of Ordinary Time? As is so often the case, there's more here than meets the eye.

The real point of the gospel story of the wedding feast of Cana is usually missed entirely. We like to focus on the poor couple who ran out of wine, and how Jesus, in his compassion, bailed them out of their dilemma, and showered his blessing upon marriage. It's ok to see the story that way, but it misses most of what's going on there. The point of the story is the verbal exchange between Mary and Jesus. In the gospel of John, this is the first public appearance of Jesus with his disciples. At this point in the Gospel, Jesus had not performed any miracles; no one knew his true identity. When Mary tells Jesus that there is no wine, Jesus appears to snap at her by saying, "How does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come." Mary seems to ignore this by telling the waiters to do whatever he says. This is the first appearance of Mary in John's gospel, and she will not appear again until the passion.

The dialogue between Mary and Jesus, which *seems* to be about wine and the lack of it, is not about wine at all. It's about setting into motion the events which would lead to Jesus' crucifixion, death and resurrection. Once the people saw Jesus' glory – as the end of

today's reading says they did – they would proclaim Him as Messiah, making his “hour,” – the hour of his death – inevitable. Mary does not respond to Jesus' question because she *herself* knew who he was, and she knew that it was *now* time to put his mission into motion. Jesus transforms the water into wine; and he will soon transform wine into his blood – which is exactly what he does at the Last Supper; and he does that so that he could be one with us in the Eucharist. The wedding feast of Cana is about the gift of the Body and Blood of Jesus on the cross and in the Eucharist. It's not about the wedding – the communion – of the bride and groom in the story; it's about the wedding – the communion – of God and humankind; Jesus is the groom and the church is the bride; and the gift of his Body and Blood on the cross and in the Eucharist makes possible the communion – the union – of God with us and us with God.

The church brings us this story at the beginning of Ordinary Time because this will be the continuing message all the way through the 34 weeks of this season – the intense passionate love that God has for his people, and how the wedding of God with his people is played out in our ordinary everyday lives.

It's also an opportunity for us to examine our own fidelity to God's love. How do we measure up as spouses of God?

**Spousal love is love borne of a choice;** two people freely choose to commit themselves one to the other. Ideally, it's the same with God and us. God has freely chosen to love

us. The question is: do we freely choose to love God? Have we consciously and intentionally made that decision – to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength?

**Spousal love is creative:** those who love as husbands and wives become a new entity: when two become one, a new community is created. When we love God and God loves us, a new community is created – a community that lives and reflects that love in everything it does.

**Spousal love is fruitful:** from their love, spouses bring new lives into the world. Love always has to move out beyond itself. The “Sound of Music” song said it best: “Love isn’t love until you give it away.” Love has to move out beyond itself, otherwise it becomes selfishness. How does our love continue to move out beyond itself to embrace others?

**Spousal love is complementary:** those who share this love complete and fulfill one another. We are incomplete without God; the emptiness we sometimes feel in the depths of our being is filled only by God’s presence; and God cannot accomplish his work on earth without us. God completes us, and we complete God.

**Spousal love is enduring:** those who truly love promise to do so until death separates them. The love that God has for us and we have for God is a love that never ends – even in death. It’s a love that endures for all eternity.

I’m sure that most of us have read the little book *Tuesday’s with Morrie*. Author Mitch Albom records his conversations with his friend Morrie Schwartz as he is dying of cancer. In his final series of conversations, Mitch asked Morrie to share his opinions and life experiences on several different topics, one of which was marriage. Happily married for 54 years to Charlotte, Morrie advised Mitch that “the biggest value” a married couple should share is their “belief in the importance of marriage.” In a word, Morrie said, “Love each other or perish.” It’s the same between God and us: “Love each other or perish.”

We have 34 weeks – interrupted by Lent and Easter – to deepen our love for God. That’s why the Church gives us these readings about marriage at the beginning of this new year.