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When Cronos Is Transformed Into Kairos

Biblical Reflection for 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time C

By Father Thomas Rosica, CSB

TORONTO, JAN. 12, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://zenit.org)).- Last Sunday gave us an opportunity to reflect on Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, and our own baptismal commitment. The wedding feast of Cana of today's Gospel (John 2:1-11) is a manifestation of God's glory and it continues the theme of Christ's Epiphany and Baptism -- of Jesus inaugurating his divine mission on earth.

The evocative text from Evening Prayer on the Feast of the Epiphany reads: "Three mysteries mark this holy day: today the star leads the Magi to the infant Christ; today water is changed into wine for the wedding feast; today Christ wills to be baptized by John in the river Jordan to bring us salvation." Each event is accompanied by a theophany, by startling evidence of divine intervention; the star, the water into wine, the voice from heaven and the dove.

The story of the wedding feast in Cana may have been constructed from a real event in Jesus' life. A careful reading of the text allows us to recognize the hand of the evangelist John reconstructing the scene, building in multiple layers of symbolic meaning. Today we look at the water becoming wine, the ordinary becoming extraordinary, and the beginnings of the Messianic age. The miracle at Cana foretells the way in which Jesus will accomplish his mission -- by shedding his blood on the cross.

Key points of the story

Let us consider several key points of this highly symbolic Gospel story that has no parallel story in the other Gospels. "Sign" (semeion) is John's symbolic term for Jesus' wondrous deeds. John is interested primarily in what the "signs" (semeia) signify: God's intervention in human history in a new way through Jesus. At Cana, symbol and reality meet: The human marriage of two young people is the occasion to speak of another marriage, the one between Christ and the Church, which will be achieved in "his hour" on the cross. At Cana in Galilee, we encounter the first sign when Jesus manifests his glory and the disciples believe.

The Mother of Jesus

The principal guest on the occasion of this wedding was not Jesus Himself but his mother, and the Gospel says that Jesus was also there as well as His apostles (1-2). The mother of Jesus is never named in John's Gospel. The title "Woman," used by Jesus for his mother is a normal, polite form of address, but unattested in reference to one's mother (see John 19:26 where she is referred to as Woman and Mother.)

Mary appears symbolically; her function is to complete the call of the disciples. She is the catalyst for the sign that leads to the disciples' expression of faith. Her words to the servants at the wedding banquet: "Do whatever He tells you" (2:5) are an invitation to all peoples to become part of the new people of God. Both at Cana and at Calvary in the fourth Gospel, Mary represents not only her maternity and physical relationship

ZENIT

with her son, but also her highly symbolic role of "Woman" and "Mother" of God's people.

Jesus' response to Mary's request is: "My hour has not yet come." In other words, it was not yet time to completely reveal his glory. That would happen on the cross. But Jesus' words to Mary are not the only indication to what this story is really about. The miracle, itself, the changing of water into wine, means that the old covenant between heaven and earth will be changed into something entirely new. At Mary's word to her Son, a sad situation is transformed. At Jesus' words to the servants at the wedding feast, the miracle takes place.

The "hour"

An important aspect of the Cana story is the use and meaning of "the hour". In the New Testament, the Greek word for hour, "hora" is more often used in reference to kairos time than to cronos time: "The hour [hora] comes and now is when the true worshiper" (4:23-24). "Hora" is used in many gospel stories of mighty works to identify the moment of healing, and in those cases it is usually translated "instantly." The "hour" spoken of by Jesus at Cana is that of his passion, death, resurrection, and ascension (John 13:1).

"Cronos" time measures ordinary occurrences and leaves the impression -- often false -- that we can control it. We can enter it into our Blackberries, iPhones and agendas and deal with time and events on our own terms.

"Kairos" time, on the other hand, represents discontinuity, when an unexpected barrier forces one to move off a planned course and adjust to new realities. Jesus' hour, his appointed time or "kairos" moment, appeared before he wanted or expected it. Jesus had one schedule in mind; circumstances pushed him in another direction.

The wedding at Cana

Many levels of interpretation have existed for this symbolic Gospel story. One way is to view the story as a description of the contrast between what Jesus was about to offer and the inadequacy of Judaism. According to this view, Judaism had exhausted itself, run dry or empty. The finely fermented wine of Christianity was about to supplant the ordinary water of Judaism.

A second interpretation often considers the joy that characterizes the emerging realm of God. Jesus had an opportunity to announce himself to people brought together by the happiness of the union of two lives. The Lord's revelation turned out to be a party within a party, a celebration within a celebration, a marriage within a marriage. This perspective builds firmly on Jewish tradition where weddings are sacred moments. The first reading for today's liturgy from Isaiah 62 begins with a wedding metaphor; the vindication of the divine will mean that Judah is no longer forsaken or desolate, for Judah will be the bride of none other than the Holy One of Israel.

The third and perhaps most profound layer of meaning shows how the disruption of "cronos" time can be transformed into an event of "kairos" time. Jesus had been expecting an introductory moment that he could identify and control. Instead, his "hora" came upon him unexpectedly, pushed on him by circumstances and by his persistent mother!

Jesus gives new life to these nuptials in Cana. He does not provide vintage wine at the start when the palates are sharp but when the wedding banquet is in full swing! The Jesus of John's Gospel saved the good wine until the "now" of a first disclosure of his glory (10). It was a manifestation or an epiphany, and it was meant to be that -- observed later in the Church as the Epiphany on the feast of Dionysius, January 6 in our calendar, when it was reputed in the Greek world the god Dionysius turned water into wine.

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Breakthrough moments

So often in our individual and community lives, in our various ministries, parishes and daily lives, we simply plod along from day to day, living with a sense of hopelessness, monotony or heaviness. We are locked into a "cronos" time, and cannot see how God wishes to break through the ordinary moments of life and transform our existence and our history into something extraordinary. The Lord invites us to allow him to fill the structures and jars of our existence with the new wine of his presence. When we listen to the Lord and do whatever he tells us, the ordinariness of our lives becomes extraordinary, the empty jars of water become filled with new wine, and we literally become the feast for one another.

The Cana Gospel episode points out to the couple a way to not fall into this situation or get out of it if they are already in it: Invite Jesus to your wedding! What happens in all marriages happens in the wedding feast at Cana. It begins with enthusiasm and joy (symbolized by the wine); but the initial enthusiasm, like the wine at Cana, comes to wane with the passage of time. Then things are done no longer for love and with joy, but out of habit and routine. It descends upon the family, if we are not careful, like a cloud of sadness and boredom. Of such couples it must sadly be said: "They have no more wine!"

Today's marvelous Gospel story is neither about Mary's intercession nor about Jesus' rebuke of his mother. The story is ultimately about the disclosure in ordinary family festive circumstances of the hidden glory of Jesus the Son. It is not about excessive drinking at Jewish weddings! It is neither about norms, traditions and rules of family life nor even about marriage. Nor is it about Judaism as empty and Christianity as being full.

John's story of the wedding at Cana invites us to consider seriously whether we think that the master of the feast who gives the command: "Fill the jars with water" can make all things new in our own lives. One's hour comes -- the kairos moment presents itself -- at the intersection of frustrated plans and openness to the Divine. Cana teaches us that the Messiah of the world had to adjust his schedule when events took a surprising turn. The story of Jesus' coming-out event as told by John demonstrates his spiritual flexibility. How can our "cronos" time be transformed into "kairos" -- a real moment of breakthrough and hope, of promise and new possibility?

Today let us beg the Lord and his Mother to make us faithful stewards, ready to do whatever Jesus tells us and eager to share with others the wine he provides. When we listen to the Lord and do whatever he tells us, the ordinariness of our lives becomes extraordinary, the empty jugs of water become filled with new wine, our cronos moments are transformed into kairos moments, and we become the feast for one another.

[The readings for the 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time C are Isaiah 62:1-5; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; and John 2:1-11]

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