

“THE NEW EXHILARATION”

Edwin Booth was one of the greatest dramatic actors of his time. But he had a terrible life. His father, who died from alcoholism, stranded his family some 3000 miles away in California. On their way back to their native Maryland, Edwin knew only one way to earn his way, and that was by becoming an actor. While in Maryland, his first wife died after two years of marriage and his second wife became insane and he went bankrupt trying to pay for her medication. To make matters worse, his younger brother assassinated Abraham Lincoln. John Wilkes Booth was Edwin's younger brother. **During this period of his life, you might say that Edwin felt “incomplete.”**

To work off his embarrassment, Edwin did the best thing that he could in order to compensate, he became a great actor. **But the Holy Spirit surprised him one day.**

While walking in Jersey City, a tall young man was being pushed by the crowd to such an extent that the young man started to fall onto the railroad tracks. Edwin, who happened to be nearby, dropped his valise and he immediately ran over toward the man. Just in the nick of time, he literally snatched this man from death, from an oncoming train.

The young man recognized the famous actor from his photographs and simply said, “Well, that was a narrow escape, Mr. Booth.”

And for as long as he lived, Edwin Booth took pleasure in the knowledge that the person whose life he saved was Robert Todd Lincoln, President Lincoln's eldest son. **So the Holy Spirit came when he least expected it, and restored his sense of decency and self-respect.**

Today's gospel reading is set in the small town of Cana, in close proximity to Nazareth, with a social setting, where there was much poverty and constant hard work. This festivity, the wedding, was one of the great occasions of joy. And it was a happy time like this that Jesus gladly shared, with several of his disciples.

At any time, the failure of provisions would have been a problem, because hospitality in the East was seen as a sacred duty; but at a wedding, this failure would be a terrible humiliation for the bride and the bridegroom. For a Jewish feast, in the East, wine was essential, as the Rabbis would attest, “Without wine, there is no joy.”

There were six stone water pots, and at the command of Jesus, the water in them turned to wine. According to Jewish tradition, seven is the number which is complete and perfect, [the world was created in seven days]; and six is the number which is unfinished and imperfect. The six stone water pots stood for all the imperfections of the Jewish law. Jesus came to do away with the imperfections of the law and to put in their place the new wine.

Each of these water pots held between twenty and thirty gallons of water. And so the math would suggest that there would be up to one hundred and eighty gallons of wine.

And that may be the point of this gospel, without the miracle that Jesus performed; without this saving action to right a doomed situation; there would be no joy.

And on a higher level, this is the deeper and more permanent truth which John was seeking to teach. For the new, more tasteful and better wine is the good news of Jesus' grace. And, when the grace of Jesus comes to us, there is more than enough for all.

Basically, we are those six water pots. And we are full of imperfections; our lives in sin, our negative interactions with others, our lapsed relationships with God. In John's words and example, whenever Jesus comes into our lives, there comes a new quality, which is like turning water into wine. Without Jesus, life is dull and stale and flat; when Jesus comes into it, life becomes vivid and sparkling and exciting. Without Jesus, life is drab and uninteresting; with him life is thrilling, exhilarating and joyful.

So, how do we allow Jesus into our lives? Saint Paul tells us it is through the works and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Paul tells us that these special gifts come from God and we are to use them in God's service. These gifts of wisdom and knowledge, faith and healings, power and prophecy, discernment of spirits and tongues, are necessary for our acceptance of Christ as Lord and for the essential unity of the Christ's Body, his Church.

When Paul founded the Church of Corinth, it was in an age of ecstasy and enthusiasm filled with hysterical excitement and self-delusion. And the people of Christ's Body had to discern what gifts they received and how to perform these gifts, not for the glory of the individual but for the good of the whole. The characteristic of a healthy body is that every part in it performs its own function for the good of the whole.

It was the gifts of the Holy Spirit that gave Mary the confidence to make this request of Jesus, at the Cana wedding. It was by her faith that Jesus first showed his glory to his disciples, who caught another dazzling glimpse of who he was.

Today's gospel reading shows us two beautiful things about Mary's faith. The first is that instinctively, Mary turned to Jesus, whenever something went wrong. There is an old legend which tells of the days when Jesus was a little boy in the home in Nazareth. It tells how in those days, when people were tired and worried, hot and bothered, and upset, they would say: "Let us go and look at Mary's child," and they would go and look at Jesus and somehow all their troubles rolled away. It is still true that those who know Jesus, intimately, will turn to him, instinctively, when things go wrong. And they never find him wanting.

The second thing is that even if Mary did not understand what Jesus was going to do, even when it seemed that he refused her request, Mary still believed in him so much that she turned to the serving folk and told them to do whatever Jesus told them to do. Mary had the faith which could trust even when it did not understand. She did not know what Jesus was going to do, but she was quite sure that he would do the right thing.

Just like with Edwin Booth, and the bride and bridegroom of our Gospel reading, in every life comes periods of darkness when we do not see the way. In every life come things, which are such that we do not see why they came or any meaning in them. Happy are we, who in such a case, even when we cannot understand, still trust that Jesus will do the right thing for us. Happy still, are we. when we convey the joy that Jesus gives us, to others!

Prayer:

"Let us invoke [the Holy Spirit] so that he will irrigate, warm and straighten, so that he will pervade us with the power of his sacred flame and renew the earth. Let us pray for this with all our hearts at this time, in these days." [Pope Benedict XV]

"Oh Holy Spirit! Transform me with and through Mary, into another Christ Jesus, for the glory of the Father and the salvation of the world." [Servant of God]. Amen!