



TAKEN FROM THE WORLD'S FIRST LOVE  
by Bishop Fulton J. Sheen

Everyone is interested in a marriage. If the human heart does not have enough love in its heart, it seeks out those who are in love. The most famous marriage in history was at Cana, because Our Blessed Lord was present there.

A marriage in the East was always a time of great rejoicing. The bridegroom went to the home of the bride, and in those days, it was never the bride who kept the bridegroom waiting, but rather the bridegroom, as in the parable, who kept the bride waiting. The bride was veiled, from head to foot, to symbolize her subjection as a wife. Both partners fasted the whole day before the marriage and confessed their sins in prayer as on the Day of Atonement

The Cana marriage is the only occasion in Sacred Scripture where Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is mentioned before him. It is very likely that it was one of her relatives who was being married, and possible that she was present at the wedding before him. It is a beautiful and a consoling thought that Our Blessed Lord, who came to teach, sacrifice, and urge us to take up our cross daily, should have begun his public life by assisting at a marriage feast.

Sometimes these Eastern marriages lasted for seven days, but in the case of the poorer people, for only two. Whatever was the case, at Cana, at some period of the entertainment the wine suddenly ran out. This was very embarrassing because of the passionate devotion of the Eastern people to hospitality, and also because of the

mortification it offered to the wedded pair. It is permitted us to conjecture why the wine should have failed. This was a wine country, and it is very likely that the host laid in an abundant supply.

The explanation for the deficiency is probably the fact that Our Blessed Lord did not come alone. He brought with him his disciples, and this apparently threw a heavy burden upon the store of wine. Our Lord and his disciples had already been journeying for three days and had covered a distance of ninety miles. The disciples were thus so hungry, and so thirsty, that it was a wonder that the food did not give out as well as the wine. Since wine was a symbol of mirth and health to the people, it was important that their need be filled-as an old Hebrew proverb put it: "Where wine is wanting, doctors thrive."

One of the most amazing features of this marriage is that it was not the wine servant, whose business it was to service the wine, who noticed the shortage, but rather Our Blessed Mother. (She notes our needs before we ourselves feel them.) She made a very simple prayer to her Divine Son about the empty wine pots when she said: "They have no wine." Hidden in the words was not only a consciousness of the power of her Divine Son, but also an expression of her desire to remedy an awkward situation.

Perhaps the Blessed Mother had already seen Our Lord work many miracles in secret--although He had not yet worked a single one in public. For if there had not already been a consciousness of the truth that He was the Son of the Omnipotent God, she would not have asked for a miracle. Some of the greatest miracles of the world have similarly been done through the influence of a mother: "The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world."

The answer of Our Blessed Lord was, "Woman what is that to me? My hour is not yet come." Note that Our Lord said: "My hour is not yet come." Whenever Our Blessed Lord used that expression, "hour," it was in relation to his passion and his death. For example, the night that Judas crossed over the brook to blister His lips with a kiss, Our Lord said: "This is your hour and the powers of darkness."

A few hours before, when seated at his Last Supper on earth and anticipating his death, he said: "Father, the hour is come. Glorify thy son with the glory that he had with Thee before the foundations of the world were laid." Earlier, when a crowd attempted to take his life by stoning, Scriptures say: "His hour was not yet come."

Our Blessed Lord was obviously, at Cana, saying that the hour in which he was to reveal himself had not yet come according to his Father's appointment. And yet, implicit in Mary's statement was a request that he actually begin it.

Scriptures tell us: "So in Cana of Galilee, Jesus began His miracles, and made known the glory that was within Him, so that His disciples learned to believe in Him." (John 2:11.) In our own language, Our Lord was saying to His Blessed Mother, "My dear Mother, do you realize that you are asking me to proclaim my Divinity--to appear before the world as the Son of God, and to prove my Divinity by my works and my miracles? The moment that I do this, I begin the royal road to the Cross."

"When I am no longer known among men as the son of the carpenter, but as the Son of God, that will be my first step toward Calvary. My hour is not yet come; but would you have me anticipate it? Is it your will that I go to the Cross? If I do this, your relationship to me changes. You are now my mother. You are known everywhere in our little village, as the 'Mother of Jesus.' But if I appear now as the Savior of men, and begin the work of Redemption, your role will change too."

"Once I undertake the salvation of mankind, you will not only be my mother, but you will also be the mother of everyone whom I redeem. I am the Head of humanity; as soon as I save the body of humanity, you, who are the mother of the head, become also the mother of the body. You will then be the universal mother, the new Eve, as I am the new Adam."

"To indicate the role that you will play in Redemption, I now bestow upon you that title of universal motherhood; I call you... "Woman." It was to you that I referred when I said to Satan that I would put enmity between him and the Woman, between his brood of evil and your seed, which I am. That great title of "Woman" I dignify you with now. And I shall dignify you with it again when my hour comes and when I am unfurled upon the Cross, like a wounded eagle."

"We are in this work of Redemption together. What is yours is mine. From this hour on, we are not just Mary and Jesus, we are the new Adam and the new Eve, beginning a new humanity, changing the water of sin into the wine of life. Knowing all this, my dear Mother, is it your will that I anticipate the Cross and that I go to Calvary?"

Our Blessed Lord was presenting to Mary not merely the choice of asking for a miracle or not; rather He was asking if she would send Him to His death. He had made it quite plain that the world would not tolerate His Divinity--that if He turned water into wine, some day wine would be changed into blood.

The answer of Mary was one of complete cooperation in the redemption of Our Blessed Lord, as she spoke for the last time in Sacred Scripture. Turning to the wine steward she said, "Do whatever he tells you." (John 2:5.)

What a magnificent valedictory! As Our Blessed Lord had said that he had come on earth to do his father's will, so Mary bids us to do the will of her Divine Son. "Do whatever he tells you." The water pots are filled, are brought to Our Blessed Lord, and then, in the magnificent lines of the poet, Richard Crashaw, "The unconscious waters saw their God, and blushed."

The first lesson from Cana is: "Aid yourself and Heaven will aid you." Our Lord could have produced wine out of nothing, as He had made the world from nothing, but He willed that the wine servants bring their pots and fill them with water. We must not expect God to transform us without our bringing something to be transformed.

In vain do we say: "O Lord, help me overcome my evil habits or let me be sober, pure, and honest." What good are these prayers unless we bring at least our own efforts? God will, indeed, make us peaceful and happy again, but only on condition that we bring the water of our own feeble efforts. We are not to remain passive, while awaiting the manifestation of God's power; there must be the indispensable gesture of our own liberty, even though it brings to God the routine waters of our colorless lives! Collaboration with God is essential if we are to become the sons of God.

The second lesson of Cana is that Mary intercedes to gain us what we need--without our always knowing our needs. Neither the wine steward nor the diners knew that the wine was failing; therefore, they could not ask for help. In like manner, if we do not know what our soul needs, how can we put such needs in our prayers? Often, we do not know what is vital to our lives.

Surely, we could go to Our Lord, as the wine steward and the diners could have. But they did not go, and some of us would not go at all. Or, if we did go, we would not always ask for the right thing. There are so few of us who know the reason for our unhappiness. We pray for wealth, to "break the bank," to win the lottery; we ask for peace of mind, and then dash off to a psychoanalytic couch. This is when we should ask for peace of soul, be on our knees bemoaning our sins and asking pardon. So few of us know that we need God. We are at the end of our strength and even of our hope; and we do not know that we ought to be asking for Divine Strength and Divine Love.

That is where devotion to Mary comes in. The people at the table did not know

what they needed to maintain the joy of the marriage feast, even when the Lord was in their midst. There are many of us who would not come to Our Lord, unless we had someone who knows our needs better than we know ourselves, and who will ask Our Lord for us. This role of Mary makes her acceptable to everyone. Those at the marriage table did not need to know she was the Mother of the Son of God in order to receive the benefit of her Divine Son. But one thing is certain--no one will ever call on her without being heard, nor without being finally led to her Divine Son, Jesus Christ, for whose sake she alone exists... for whose sake she was made pure--and for whose sake she was given to us.

The Marriage Feast of Cana also reveals how Mary makes up for our battered and weak wills; she does this by substituting herself for us. It is very hard for us to receive a Divine Favor unless we desire it. Until we love and serve God, we are inert and dead. It is impossible for most of us to ask for a soul-healing, for so few of us know that we are wounded.

Mary comes into this crisis of life, to substitute for us in the same way that a mother substitutes for a sick child. The child cannot tell the mother its need. There may be a pin pricking it, it may be hungry, or it may be sick. The child may cry, but it is as vague a complaint as our own adult cries when we are unhappy and fearful, worried and frustrated. The mother in such a circumstance carries the child to the doctor. The mother thus puts herself in the place of the child, who does not have the knowledge to know what is best for it, or cannot will to do anything to help itself. She "doubles," as it were, for the freedom of the child.

Thus, does the mother position the child to receive what is best for it. And as the mother knows the needs better than the babe, so the Blessed Mother understands our cries and worries, and knows them better than we know ourselves. As the baby needs the doctor, so the Blessed Mother knows we need her Divine Son. As Our Lord mediates between us and the Heavenly Father, so the Blessed Mother mediates between us and Our Divine Lord.

She fills our empty pots; she supplies the elixir of life; she prevents the joys of life from ebbing away. Mary is not our salvation--let us be clear on that. The mother is not the doctor, and neither is Mary the Savior. But Mary brings us *to* the Savior!

Three years now pass, and all that Our Blessed Lord told his mother at Cana is fulfilled. The hour is come; the wine has changed to blood. He has worked his miracles and men have crucified him. Unfurled on either side of him, as if to put him in their class, are two thieves. The world will allow only the mediocre to live. It hates the very wicked, like the thieves, because they disturb its possessions and security. It also hates the Divinely Good; it hates Our Blessed Lord, because he

disturbs its conscience, its heart, and its evil desires.

Our Blessed Lord now looks down from His Cross to the two most beloved creatures that he has on earth, John and his Blessed Mother. He picks up the refrain of Cana, and addresses Our Blessed Mother with the same title he gave her at the marriage feast. He calls her, "Woman." It is the second Annunciation. With a gesture of his dust-filled eyes and his thorn-crowned head, He looks longingly at her, who had sent him willingly to the Cross, who is now standing beneath it as a cooperator in his Redemption and he says: "Behold thy son."

Then, turning to John, he does not call him "John." To do that would have been to address him as the son of Zebedee and no one else. But, in his anonymity, John stands for all of us. Our Lord thus says to his beloved disciple, "Son, behold thy mother."

Here is the answer, after all these years, to the mysterious words in the Gospel of the Incarnation which stated that Our Blessed Mother laid her "first born" in the manger. Did that mean that Our Blessed Mother was to have other children? It certainly did, but not according to the flesh. Our Divine Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, is the only Son of Our Blessed Mother by the flesh. But Our Lady was to have other children... us... not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit!