

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)
January 14, 2007
By Father Charles Bowes

Isaiah 62:1-5
Psalm 96:1-3, 7-10
1 Corinthians 12:4-11
John 2:1-11

There is no limit on God's love of us.

I enjoy having friends over for dinner. I'm always worried about having enough for everyone - enough food, things to drink, the beverages. "Will I have enough?" I inevitably ask myself, and then prepare too much and spend days enjoying leftovers or having still more folks in for dinner so nothing is wasted. So this story of the wedding at Cana I find really meaningful - a kindred spirit in the hosts who actually run short, and the amazing surprise of abundance as a gift, sheer gift from God.

Who knows what really happened that day? We only know that the wedding was out of wine. The party was in danger of dying. The family was on the verge of public shame. Mary sees the problem and says to Jesus, "They have no wine." But what those words really mean is: "Jesus, get the lead out! Bring the joy of the covenant God made with his people alive! Bring honor back to the household of God! Inebriate your people with the love of God!" Those are the outcries behind: "They have no wine."

And so Jesus really gives the wine - the foretaste of what is to be - the amount of wine produced. But look at the math of what the story says Jesus provided to save the day. What do six jars holding 15 to 25 gallons each mean in terms of providing the guests with enough wine to drink? When poured out, there

would be 1,800 half-liter bottles of wine, or 3,600 glasses. If there were about 100 guests, normative for weddings of that day, each guest would get about 18 bottles each, give or take a few guests. And don't forget, that was after the people had been drinking for awhile. You wonder how they all made it home.

180 gallons! Enough wine to give 3,840 people a standard 6-ounce serving. Enough wine to offer 180 lucky guests their own private gallon. Enough wine to fill six large garbage cans, eight wading pools, two oversized water heaters or the back end of an SUV. Enough wine to launch a flotilla of model boats or sink a hostess into debt. Enough wine to make everyone in Cana either sit up and take notice or fall down in a stupor. 180 gallons.

It's as if we can't quite wrap our minds around the sheer abundance that flowed through Cana that day. Our eyes skim over the numbers in this story as if they are mere filler, an intriguing detail added to keep our interest or make the story come alive. Our familiarity numbs us to the fact that at this wedding feast, no one, absolutely no one, will go away thirsty. Isaiah says, "As a bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so shall your God rejoice in you." This miracle poured out by the gallons is a sign - a concrete reminder of God's delight in us. It is a symbol of the covenant that binds

us - a bond cemented not by guilt or by threats, but by the love that one newlywed holds out to the other. We are each newly married to God every day. This miracle of the jars is an epiphany, a moment when God is revealed to us. And yet those words of Jesus, "My time has not yet come," remind us that this epiphany - this gallon-by-gallon revelation of God's overflowing presence - is simply one signpost along the way. The transformation of water into wine, just like the healing of the lepers, and the raising of Lazarus, and the restoration of the bleeding woman, is a marker that invites us to look beyond. Like legends on a map or bearings on a compass, these miracles point us down the road and guide us along the way.

On that journey, the true epiphany comes when we face the loss of dreams or the loss of friendship - when we battle human betrayal or physical pain; when we find ourselves alone, on our knees, in despair looking up at the cross - and we remember...God wants to make emptiness overflow.

Gallon by gallon, jar by jar, God sends us miraculous signs every day - a chance to start over, forgiven, whenever we have sinned. A place at the table, fed, whenever we are hungry. A standing invitation to join the party, even when it appears as if the wine has run dry.

The true epiphany comes when we allow ourselves to be open enough, thirsty enough, empty enough to

receive God's tidal wave of new wine.

Let us pray: Flood our hearts with confidence in your love and in your power, O Creator God! Help us trust that you rejoice in us, as Isaiah promises! May your gift to us overflow into words of encouragement for all we meet. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**There is no limit on God's love
for us.**