

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS” – 2nd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME -C-
Isaiah 62: 1-5 Psalm 1 Corinthians 12: 4-11 John 2: 1-11

By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

We are still in the first days of the New Year. Many of us made New Year’s resolutions; not just about losing weight, exercising and watching less television. We also resolved to be more patient around the house; spend more time with the kids; give some time to a worthy cause. How many of these good intentions have we kept? In the press of busy days and having too much to do, with too little time to do it, we may have found ourselves back in old patterns of behavior. We made our resolutions with the best of intentions at renewal, hoping to start all over again, wanting to get out of our ruts. But the efforts didn’t produce the fruits we hoped for, so we shrug our shoulders and say, “Same old, same old.”

There are other factors that tempt us to discouragement. One-year slips into the next, marked by no bigger change than replacing the old calendar with a new one. Everything feels the way it did in December, September or April of last year—and the year before. We are who we are--- so we reason. We still have the same issues at home, work, school and among our friends. The world hasn’t changed much either: old struggles against poverty, disease, civil unrest, border wars, and vast injustices are still there. Feels like the “same old, same old.”

I wonder if the Israelites, just back from their exile in Babylon, didn’t have similar feelings of discouragement and ennui? Perhaps they looked at the former glorious Jerusalem, now in ruins and their cherished Temple, now a pile of stones, with the same feelings we have---wondering where they could ever get the energy to start all over again. And if they did make the attempts to put their lives back together, would they persevere till the end, or would the effort prove too much for them? As we look at what we have to address in our lives and world, it is tempting to throw up our hands and say, “What’s the use? What difference can I make? The next New Year will roll around and I will be pretty much the way I am now—and so will the rest of the world!”

The prophet has a clearer vision for the returned exiles and those of us who feel like exiles from our better selves. He sees restoration for Israel. But the restoration will come from God. Sure, the people will have plenty of work to do, but they can be assured that God has seen their need and is doing something to bring their hopes to fruition. The new Israel would be called by a new name—a sign of a new relationship with God; given royal stature and entrusted to God’s hands for security and—reminiscent of language used by Hosea—the people will be covenanted to God in such a strong bond it can only be described in nuptial imagery. God will be wedded

to the people. (We hear hints of today's gospel here.) The "Workbook for Lectors and Gospel Readers" (Aelred R. Rosser, Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2003) says, "Few passages in the Bible equal this one as a statement of the degree and kind of love that motivates God toward earth. Little wonder that such love is never withdrawn" (Page 48).

Strange to begin the "ordinary Sundays" with today's Gospel passage. It is out of sequence. On the Sundays through this liturgical year, we will be hearing from Luke, yet today we begin the season with John. However, this Gospel does set up the subsequent Sundays. God has come, as Isaiah promises in the first reading, to espouse a people. Jesus is the sign that this espousal is taking place. Maybe the wedding feast of Cana is the best story to begin with, since it speaks so richly of God's desire to be one with us. A weary people have a Lover-God who lightens their loads and renews their spirits. All Jesus' words and actions in forthcoming Sundays will show God's reaching out as a lover to the beloved. Not just to an individual beloved either; for a wedding is a community affair. The whole community will celebrate this new bond with God. We had run out of wine, did not have the means to celebrate, so God enters the scene and gives us reason to rejoice: a new wine in a new age. The old patterns don't have to be repeated. The days just don't have to slip away with un-kept resolutions and promises. A new wine warms our spirits; new life takes the place of the old.

The story is about more than turning water into wine. It is a "sign" and each "sign" is an epiphany (as the passage says, "revealed his glory"), a manifestation of who Jesus is, so that people would accept him and the nearness of God that he brings. For here there are people wanting to celebrate but not having the means to do that. Jesus makes possible our celebration of God's nearness. (Isaiah voices it today, "As a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.") In Jesus, God has come close and given us the reason and the means to celebrate. God has saved the good wine till last. (One commentator suggests that scriptural reflection groups might view the movie "Babette's Feast" as a way of feeling the significance of this Gospel tale of wine and celebration.)

Considering the enormous needs people had in Jesus' time (in our times as well), this miracle seems rather insignificant: a small town, an anonymous couple and a wedding running out of wine. Embarrassing perhaps: but not a major tragedy. It wasn't as if someone was dying of a fatal illness or had a serious physical problem like blindness. Yet, John makes a big deal of this story, and we suspect he intends more than we initially perceive. There are only seven miracles, "signs," in this gospel, a small number compared to those in the Synoptics. In addition, this the first miracle John presents in his account of Jesus' ministry; one suspects there is more here than first meets the eye.

Jesus doesn't only meet a momentary need. Nor does he provide just enough wine to deal with an awkward family situation. He is not a minimalist. His sign is of abundant wine and wine so good that it earns the praise of the headwaiter. The headwaiter's words are the ones we are left with as the story soon comes to a close. We leave the story with his words in our ears, "...you have kept the good wine until now." We hear these words with the ears of faith. God is doing what God promised in Isaiah, wedding us with an abundant and unending love. God is not a fickle partner in this relationship. God will be there to give us reason to celebrate, even in the most difficult moments.

This God of ours is not stingy; does not run out on us; does not let our lives diminish in meaning and vision. In our culture, youth is deified; while aging is seen as a decline. But with God and the good wine Jesus is, our lives continue to grow. As we age our faith gives us a taste of life in new ways, we drink a wine that keeps getting better and better, filling us with a longing for that best wine we will drink at God's banquet table. Meanwhile, the wine of our Eucharist today is the promise that God will be more than enough for us and that in Jesus we will have reason to celebrate throughout our journey. The God revealed in the Cana "sign" is very "present tense;" quite capable of making this moment of our journey something to celebrate. Even as we suffer sickness, the death of loved ones and other significant losses, our Cana God stays with us. Indeed, in surprising ways, God enables us to say what we wouldn't think possible, "Here at this moment of my life I celebrate God. This is good wine indeed!" Later Jesus will spell out what we already sense at Cana, "I have come that you may have life, and have it more abundantly" (10:10).

ONE GOOD EMAIL SOURCE FOR PREACHERS

There is another free preaching service you might like to know about. Sr. Patricia Bruno, OP offers a monthly email she calls, "Stories Seldom Heard." She reflects on biblical stories we don't usually find in the Sunday or weekday Lectionary selections. Often they are about biblical women. She also includes liturgical and poetic materials that are helpful for personal reflection and prayer, as well as for preaching retreats and days of reflection. If you would like to receive these notes drop her a line at: Purple115@Juno.com

JUSTICE NOTES

World Resources Institute says that someone living in a developed nation uses twice as much grain, three times as much meat, nine times as much paper, and eleven times as much gasoline as someone living in developing nations. The problem is not a lack of resources but the way

those resources are being disproportionately consumed. Another window into the same reality: 16 percent of the world's population spends 80 percent of the world's private consumption.

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I am posting in this space several inmates' names and locations. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know that: we have not forgotten them; are praying for them and their families; or, whatever personal encouragement you might like to give them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith against the Death Penalty."

Thanks, Jude Siciliano, OP

Please write to...

- Kyle O Berry #0562597 (On death row since 3/30/01)
- Travis Walters #0567544 (4/5/01)
- Fernando Garcia #0702066 (4/19/01)
- Charles W. Roache #0345539 (4/25/01)

-----Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, NC 27606

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1. CD Available: "FIRST IMPRESSIONS: PREACHING REFLECTIONS ON LITURGICAL YEAR C." The CD contains two reflections for almost all the Sundays and major feasts of the year. In addition, there are helpful essays for preaching during the liturgical seasons (Advent, Lent, the Triduum, etc.), ten book reviews and essays on various aspects of preaching. The files are in three formats (Microsoft Word, WordPerfect and PDF) so you should have no trouble opening them on your computer.

To purchase go to: <http://www.preacherexchange.com> click on the "Year C-CD" button on the left and follow the instructions.

2. I get notes from people responding to these reflections. Sometimes they tell how they use "First Impressions" in their ministry and for personal use. Others respond to the reflections, make suggestions and additions. I think our readers would benefit from these additional thoughts. If you drop me a BRIEF note, I will be happy to add your thoughts and reflections to my own. (FrJude@JudeOP.org)

3. Our webpages: <http://www.preacherexchange.com> and <http://www.opsouth.org/> (Where you will find “Preachers’ Exchange,” which includes "First Impressions" and “Homilias Dominicales,” as well as articles, book reviews and quotes pertinent to preaching.)

4. "First Impressions" is a service to preachers and those wishing to prepare for Sunday worship. It is sponsored by the Southern Dominican Province, U.S.A. If you would like "First Impressions" sent weekly to a friend, [Click Here](#).