

Looking back to a time when we could invite as many people as we wanted into our houses (and I suppose looking forward to the time when we will be able to do the same again), when you are having people around for a meal or a party, one of the decisions to be made as a host is that of how much to provide for our guests. Over do it and you are left with a mountain of unconsumed food and drink that you don't know what to do with. Provide too little on the other hand and you end up with a situation that is embarrassing for host and guest alike.

This is, at the lowest level, the situation presented to us in our Gospel reading today. A couple are celebrating their marriage. In the society of that time, this would have been an event involving the whole community, spanning several days. For the provisions of the wedding banquet to run out would have spelt humiliation for the family in the face of the community.

It is into this situation that Jesus comes in our Gospel narrative. Let us just lay aside the details of the story, the number of water jars, the number 6, even the quality of the wine that was brought to the master of the banquet.

What I see is a situation transformed by the presence of Jesus. As I thought over that I began to think how Christ can transform even our darkest moments and experiences. I remember when I was in Northern Ireland in that period we now refer to as 'The Troubles'. Sunday by Sunday, we used to pray for peace in Northern Ireland at a time when there was anything but peace. We prayed almost despite ourselves, in our darker moments wondering was there any point.

The situation in Northern Ireland was changed, indeed transformed. Now there is still work to do in building on the peace, but no-one can deny the transformation that occurred. We get into the territory here of how God answers prayer. What do we even mean when we say that God has answered prayer; or, for that matter, not answered prayer? I do think prayer changes things. And prayer has the capacity to change the people who pray – if I pray consistently for peace, I become more and more an instrument of peace. God does work through people, through people changing their attitudes, outlooks, behaviour.

Which leads me to a question – am I a person who is open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, am I a person who is willing to change, to be used by God to change situations of tension? Am I willing to go in the name of Christ to be an instrument of transformation, to bring light into situations of darkness, hope into situations of despair?

I think that is what lay at the heart of what President Joe Biden was talking about in his Inaugural Address this week, as he encouraged the American people to listen to those who differ from them, to seek peace rather than conflict, hope rather than despair.

Paul, in his various letters to the Churches, speaks of God working in and through the life of his Church, through the lives of individual members of his Church. In his letter to the Galatians, he says of himself:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. *Gal 2:20*

In the coming weeks we will be following the early stages of the ministry of Jesus; the call of those first disciples, his ministry of teaching and healing, the beginnings of his confrontation with the religious establishment that was to lead to his suffering and death. Those first disciples were called not just to be followers; they were called to go out in his name to teach, to heal, to be the lips, the hands, the feet of their master.

We read as our Gospel story today of an occasion that at one level was one of potentially acute embarrassment; on another level it was one of the transforming power of the presence of Jesus.

In our own day we are called not just to admire but to imitate the Christ who calls us to follow him. May we go out into whatever situation God places us this week; that we might be the hands, the lips, the feet of Christ; that we might be enabled to bring something of his transforming, reconciling presence – may we be channels, instruments of the love of God in Christ.

**Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi**

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood as to understand;  
to be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive;

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen