

## *This beginning of signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee*

+

Slowly, carefully, as inconspicuously as possible, a man works his way through the crowd. He needs to speak to Jesus. He knows that he's breaking the Law but he carries on. He suffers from leprosy; and he knows that he's supposed to stay away from the crowds; that's he's supposed to keep his distance; to announce as loudly as he possibly can that he is unclean. To warn them. But he also knows that if he does that, he'll never get near this Jesus; never have a chance to ask for help; never have a chance to be healed. Never have a chance to live a normal life. So he carries on, all the while breaking the Law. Until he gets to Jesus. And when he gets to Jesus, he kneels down on the ground in front of him, begging, imploring Jesus to help him: *'If you will, Lord, you can make me clean.* And seeing the man kneeling in front of him, Jesus is moved with compassion. He stretches out his hand. He touches him; and the poor man is made clean.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus and his disciples are in Jerusalem. And as they walk about the city, they see a man who has been blind from the moment of his birth. And while his disciples are more concerned with matters of sin and guilt; – 'who sinned,' they ask, 'that he was born blind' – Jesus instead focuses on what this poor man most needs. So he kneels down to the ground and he spits and makes a bit of mud with the mixture of dirt and saliva. And without a word exchanged between them, Jesus rubs this mud on the blind man's eyes. And he tells the blind man to make his way a short distance to the Pool of Siloam; he sends him to the pool that he might wash the mud from his eyes. And the man does as he is told; and he comes back from the pool healed: able to see as he has never before in his life been able to see.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus and his disciples have been on the road; making their way from one Gentile region to another. And as they come to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, to the area called the Decapolis, a man is brought to him. The man is deaf; and perhaps because he cannot hear properly he also struggles with speech. So Jesus takes him away from the crowds. And when they are alone together, he takes his fingers and puts them into this man's ears; and he spits and with the spital on his fingers he touches the man's tongue. And he turns his eyes to the sky and sighs and prays that the man's ears might be opened. And the man is healed; he hears and he speaks with clarity and understanding.<sup>3</sup>

Now, in so many different ways, these three men stand for all of humanity; for all of us: suffering and broken; blind and deaf; unable to speak clearly with compassion and understanding. Whether it's the social brokenness of rejection and loneliness where we so easily turn away from those who frighten us or offend us; or the blindness we have to the image of God that resides in each and every one of our sisters and brothers; or our failure to hear the cries of those in need. In one way or another, these three represent all of us who struggle every day in a broken world. And, in one way or another, these three represent all the many different ways in which God's grace offers us healing and wholeness and hope. What Christ does for them is exactly what Christ is willing to do for each and every one of us.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mark 1:40-45

<sup>2</sup> John 9:1-7

<sup>3</sup> Mark 7:31-37

And, as you may have noticed, in each one of these situations, Jesus uses outward signs: visible and audible signs that speak of his power to heal, to restore, and renew. Whether it's the touch that he gives to the many suffering from leprosy; for the mud that he smears on the eyes of the man who is blind; or the spit that he uses to heal a man's speech. Outward and visible signs of power and grace.

And that, of course, is exactly the same way that God works with us: outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace: the water of baptism, for example, with the name of the Holy Trinity, reassure us outwardly of what God is doing inwardly: that we are being washed of sin and welcomed into the life of God the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the bread and wine of the Eucharist, for example, and the words spoken by Christ at the Last Supper, reassure us outwardly of what God is offering us inwardly: that we are being given nothing less than the spiritual Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ; whose body broken on the Cross and risen from the tomb is the evidence of our own new life: our new power, in Christ, to overcome all those things that threaten to destroy us, even death. Over and over again, God works through material things, through sacraments, to show us what he's doing for us, and with us, from the inside out. Just as Christ does when he heals the sick and the blind and the deaf: using tangible material to convey spiritual grace and power.

Over and over again, in so many of the miracle stories; except, curiously, in the Gospel story which we hear this week. Because in the story of water turned into wine, Jesus never addresses the water; never looks at it; never touches it; never even prays over it. In John's account Jesus has nothing at all to do with this water that will become wine. He only speaks to the servants, and the servants obey. And, in that moment, something happens to the water, from the inside out.

So the crucial role in this week's Gospel is actually played by the servants; because, in a deeper way, it's the servants who are the outward and visible sign of the power of Christ to change not just water into wine but each and every moment of our lives, moments of crisis and need; moments of uncertainty and fear; of loneliness and rejection. In this week's Gospel it's the servants that show the power of Christ to take every day things and turn them into something better: outward and visible signs of the power of Christ to take all the ordinary moments of day-to-day life and to make them something more than ordinary, something even extraordinary, because, in Christ, they become moments for grace to enter in. The servants obey; and water is turned into wine. A social disaster is averted, and God's compassion and care are seen, all because they obeyed.

Like the servants at the wedding feast, we are called to be living, breathing, walking, talking sacraments. We are called to be outward and visible signs of the power that God has to take our moments of challenge and crisis and fear and to change them from the inside out. Our lives are to be outward and visible signs of God's power and grace.

But we cannot be these little sacraments to our broken world if our love is not genuine; if our loves confused with those other things that sometimes look like love but aren't. So, hear again what St. Paul tells us we must do if our love is to be genuine; if our love is to be without dissimulation, as this week's Epistle puts it. Hear again what St. Paul tells us we must do if we are to be the outward and visible signs of the power of God to take the ordinary water of everyday life and change it into something better:

*Rejoice in hope... Be patient in tribulation... Be constant in prayer. ... Show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you... [And] live in harmony with [each] other.*