

The Wedding at Cana

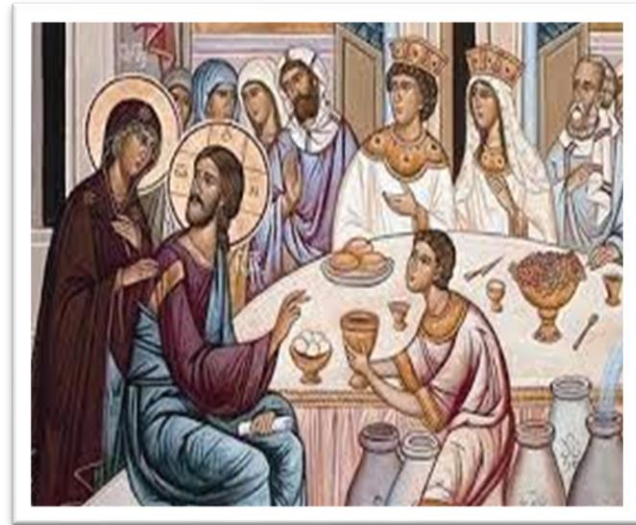
Cana, situated on the west side of a hill, was a clean, pleasant place, not so large as Capharnaum. It had a synagogue to which were attached three priests. Near it was the public house at which the wedding was to be held. It had a forecourt planted with trees and shrubs. From this house to the synagogue, the street was adorned with leafy festoons and arches from which hung garlands and fruits. The festal hall extended from the entrance of the house back to and beyond the fireplace, a high wall with ledges

in it, which was now adorned like an altar with vases and flowers and gifts for the bride. Almost a third of this spacious hall was behind the fireplace, and there the women sat at the wedding banquet. The beams supporting the upper story were likewise hung with garlands, and there were means of ascent in order to light the lamps fastened to them.

When Jesus with His disciples arrived near Cana, He was most deferentially received by Mary, the bride's parents, the bridegroom, and others that had come out to meet Him. Jesus with His familiar disciples, among them the future Apostles, took up His abode in an isolated house belonging to the maternal aunt of the bridegroom. This aunt also was a daughter of Anne's sister Sobe. She held the mother's place to the bridegroom during the wedding ceremonies. The bride's father was named Israel and was a descendant of Ruth of Bethlehem. He was an opulent merchant, who carried on a large freighting business. He owned warehouses and great inns and storing places along the highroads for supplying caravans with fodder. His employees were numerous, for most of the inhabitants of Cana earned their living by working for him; in fact, all business transactions were wholly in the hands of himself and a few others. The bride's mother was a little lame; she limped on one side and had to be led.

All the relatives of St. Anne and Joachim had come from around Galilee to Cana, in all over one hundred guests. Mary Marcus, John Marcus, Obed, and Veronica had come from Jerusalem. Jesus Himself brought about twenty-five of His disciples with Him.

Long ago had Jesus, in His twelfth year at the children's feast held in the house of St. Anne upon His return from the Temple, addressed to the bridegroom words full of mysterious significance on the subject of bread and



wine. He had told him that at some future day He would be present at his marriage. Jesus' participation in this marriage, like every other action of His earthly career, had, besides its high, mysterious signification, its exterior, apparent, and ordinary motives. More than once had Mary sent messengers to Jesus begging Him to be present at it. The friends and relatives of the Holy Family, judging from a human view, were making such speeches as these: "Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is a lone widow. Jesus is roaming the country, caring little for her or His relatives, etc., etc." It was on this account, therefore, that Mary was anxious that her Son should honor His friends by His presence at the marriage. Jesus entered into Mary's views and looked upon the present as a fitting opportunity to disabuse them of their erroneous ideas. He undertook also to supply one course of the feast, and so Mary went to Cana before the other guests and helped in the various preparations. Jesus had engaged to supply all the wine for the feast, wherefore it was that Mary so anxiously reminded Him that the wine failed. Jesus had also invited Lazarus and Martha to Cana. Martha assisted with Mary in the preparations, and it was Lazarus who defrayed (a circumstance known only to Jesus and Mary) all the expenses assumed by Jesus at the feast. Jesus had great confidence in Lazarus, and willingly received everything from him, while Lazarus was only too happy to give to Jesus. He was up to the last like the treasurer of the Community. During the whole feast, he was treated by the bride's father as a person of special distinction, and he even personally busied himself in his service. Lazarus was very refined in his manners, his whole demeanor earnest, quiet, and marked by a dignified affability; he spoke little, and his bearing toward Jesus was full of loving devotedness. Besides the wine, Jesus had also engaged to supply one course of the banquet, which course consisted of the principal viands, such as birds of all kinds, fruits, and vegetables. For all these provision had been made. Veronica had brought with her from Jerusalem a basket of the choicest flowers and the most skillfully made confections. Jesus was like the Master of the feast. He conducted all the amusements, which He seasoned with His own instructions. He it was, too, who arranged the whole order of the wedding ceremonies. He directed that all guests should amuse themselves on those days according to the customs usual on such occasions, but at the same time draw some lesson of wisdom from their various enjoyments. Among other things, He ordered that twice in the day the guests should leave the house, to amuse themselves in the open air.

Then I saw the wedding guests in a garden, the men and women separate, amusing themselves with conversation and games. The men reclined in circles on the ground. In the center were all kinds of fruit which, according to

certain rules, they threw at one another. The thrower aimed at making it fall into certain holes or circles, while the others sought to prevent its doing so. I saw Jesus with cheerful gravity taking part in the game. Frequently He smilingly uttered a word of wisdom that made His hearers wonder. Deeply impressed, they received it in silence, the less quick to perceive its meaning asking for an explanation from their neighbor. Jesus had the inner circle and decided the prizes, which He awarded with beautiful and sometimes quite astonishing remarks. The younger of the guests amused themselves by running and leaping over leafy festoons and heaps of fruit. The women sat apart and played also for fruit, the bride's seat being always between Mary and the bridegroom's aunt.

There was also performed a kind of dance. Children played on musical instruments and sang choruses at intervals. The dancers, both the men and the maidens, held scarves with which they touched one another when dancing in rows or in rings. Without those scarves they never touched one another. Those of the bride and bridegroom were black, the others were yellow. At first, the bride and bridegroom danced alone, then all danced together. The maidens wore veils, but partly raised over the face; their dresses were long in the back, but a little raised in front by means of laces. There was no leaping nor springing in the dance, as is customary amongst us. It was more a moving in all kinds of figures, accompanied by frequent swaying of the person and keeping time to the music with the hands, the head, and the whole body. Though perfectly modest and graceful, it reminded me of that swaying of the Pharisaical Jews at prayer. None of the future Apostles took part in the dance; but Nathanael Chased, Obed, Jonathan, and some others of the disciples entered into it. The female dancers were the maidens only. The order observed was quite extraordinary, and a spirit of tranquil joyousness prevailed among the guests.

During those days of rejoicing, Jesus had frequent private interviews with those disciples that were later on to become His Apostles. But the others were not neglected. Jesus often walked with them and with all the other guests in the country around and instructed them. The future Apostles often explained Jesus' teachings to their companions. This going abroad of the guests facilitated the preparations for the feast indoors. Several of the disciples, however, and even Jesus Himself at times, were present at the preparations going on in the house, helping to arrange this or that, and besides, several of them had a part in the bridal procession.

Jesus intended to manifest Himself at this feast to all His friends and relatives. He wished also that all whom He had chosen up to the present, should become known to one another and to His own relatives. This could be

done with greater freedom on such an occasion as this marriage festival. Jesus taught likewise in the synagogue before the assembled guests. He spoke of the enjoyment of lawful pleasures, of the motives through which they might be indulged, and of the moderation and prudent reserve that ought to accompany them. Then He spoke of marriage, of husband and wife, of continence, of chastity, and of spiritual unions. At the close of the instruction, the bridal pair stepped out in front of Jesus, and He addressed each separately.

The Nuptial Ceremony. The Women's Game. The Men's Lottery

On the third day after Jesus' arrival, at about nine o'clock in the morning, the marriage ceremony was performed. The bride had been adorned by her bridesmaids. Her dress was something like that worn by the Mother of God at her espousals. Her crown, too, was similar, though more richly ornamented. But her hair was not netted in strands so fine as was that of Mary, the braids were fewer and thicker. When fully attired, she was presented to the Blessed Virgin and the other women.

The bride and bridegroom were conducted processionally from the house of festivity to the synagogue and back again. Six little boys and as many little girls with garlands and wreaths headed the procession. Then came six larger boys and six larger girls with flutes and other musical instruments. On their shoulders stood out some kind of stiff material like wings. Twelve young maidens accompanied the bride as bridesmaids, and the same number of youths the bridegroom. Among the latter were Obed, Veronica's son, Joseph of Arimathea's nephews, Nathanael Chased, and some of John's disciples, but none of the future Apostles.

The nuptial ceremony was performed by the priest in front of the synagogue. The rings exchanged by the young pair had been presented to the bridegroom by Mary after Jesus had blessed them for her. I remarked something at this marriage that had escaped me at the nuptials of Joseph and Mary; viz., the priest pierced the left ring finger of both bridegroom and bride with a sharp instrument, just at the place where the ring was to be worn. Then he caught in a glass of wine two drops of blood from the bridegroom and one from the bride. The contents of the glass the young couple then drank in common, and afterward gave away the glass. After this many other articles, such as scarves and other pieces of clothing, were bestowed upon the poor gathered around. When the bridal pair were reconducted to the festal house, Jesus Himself received them.

Before the wedding banquet I saw all the guests again assembled in the garden. The women and maidens sat on a carpet in an arbor and played for fruit. They passed from one to another a little, triangular tablet on the edge

of which were inscribed certain letters, and which was provided also with an index. The tablet was rested on the lap, the index twirled, and the point over which it paused determined the prizes.

But for the amusement of the men, I beheld a wonderful game, contrived by Jesus Himself in the summerhouse. In the center of the house stood a round table with as many portions of flowers, leaves, and fruits placed around the edge as there were players. Jesus had, beforehand and alone, arranged these portions, each with reference to some mysterious signification. Above the surface of the table was a movable disk with a slot in it. The portion of fruit or flowers over which the slot rested when the disk was revolved, became the prize of him who had turned it. In the center of the table, a vine branch laden with grapes rose out of a bundle of ears of wheat. The longer the disk was turned, the higher rose the grapes and wheat. Neither the future Apostles nor Lazarus took part in the game. I was told at the time that whoever had received a call to teach or who was to be favored with greater knowledge than his companions, should not engage in the game: he should watch the results and be ready to season them with instructive applications. Thus would gravity and hilarity mutually temper each other.

In this game arranged by Jesus, there was something very wonderful and more than fortuitous, for the prize that fell to the players severally was significant of his own individual inclinations, faults, and virtues. This Jesus explained to each as the prize he had won was assigned him. Each prize was, as it were, a parable, a similitude upon the winner himself, and I felt that with the fruit he actually received something interiorly. All were touched and animated by the words of Jesus, perhaps also by the partaking of the fruit whose significant properties were now producing their effect. What Jesus said about each prize was quite unintelligible to all that it did not concern. It was received by the bystanders as only a pleasant, pointed remark. But each felt that the Lord had cast a deeply penetrating glance into his own interior. The same thing happened here as at Jesus' words to Nathanael relative to that gazing under the fig tree. They had sunk deep into Nathanael's soul, while from the others their meaning remained hidden.

I remember even yet that mignonette was one among the flowers, and that Jesus, when awarding his prize to Nathanael Chased, said to him: "Now canst thou understand that I was right in saying to thee: Thou art a true Israelite in whom there is no guile."

I saw one of the prizes producing most wonderful effects. Nathanael, the bridegroom, won a remarkable piece of fruit. There were two pieces on a single stem: one was like a fig, the other, which was hollow, more like a ribbed apple. They were of a reddish color, the inside white and streaked

with red. I have seen similar in Paradise.

I perceived that the bystanders were very much surprised when the bridegroom won that fruit, and that Jesus spoke of marriage and of chastity, and dwelt upon the hundredfold fruit of the latter. And yet in all that Jesus said on these subjects, there was nothing that could shock the Jewish ideas on the score of marriage. Some of the Essenian disciples, James the Less for instance, comprehended better than the others the deep significance of His words.

I saw that the guests wondered more over that prize than over any other, and I heard Jesus saying that those fruits could produce effects far greater than was the remarkable signification attached to them. After the bridegroom and bride had eaten the fruit they had won, I saw the former become very much agitated. He grew pale, and a dark vapor escaped from him, after which he looked to me much brighter and purer, yes, even transparent when compared with what he had been before. The bride, too, who at a distance was sitting among the women, became after eating her piece of fruit quite faint. A dark shadow appeared to go out from her. The fruit that the bridal pair ate bore some reference to chastity.

There were certain penances connected with the different prizes. I remember seeing both the bride and bridegroom bringing something away from the synagogue, and performing certain devotions. Nathanael Chased's prize was a little bunch of sorrel.

In each of the other disciples, there awoke after eating their prizes his predominant passion. It struggled a little for the mastery, and then either departed, or the possessor became by the combat strengthened against its assaults. The vegetable kingdom before the Fall was endowed with certain supernatural virtues, but since the taint of sin the power of plants remains for man a secret. The form, the taste, the effects of the various herbs and fruits, are now but simple vestiges of the virtues they possessed before sin touched them. In my visions, I have seen upon the celestial tables fruits such as they were before the Fall. But their peculiar attributes were not always quite clear to me. Such things appear confused to our darkened understanding rendered even more obtuse by the customs of ordinary life. When the bride fainted, her attendants relieved her of some of her heaviest ornaments. From her fingers they drew several of her numerous rings. Among them was a gold funnel-shaped shield worn like a thimble on the middle finger. They removed also the bracelets and chains from her arms and breast. The only ornament she retained beside the marriage ring, which the Blessed Virgin had given, was a gold pendant from the neck. It was in shape something like an oblong arch on the plain of which was inlaid something in

brown, like that of the wedding ring of Mary and Joseph. On that brown ground reclined a figure attentively considering a flower bud which it held in its hand.

The game in the garden was followed by the nuptial banquet. That part of the spacious hall of the festal house on this side of the adorned fireplace, was divided into three spaces by two movable screens so low that the guests reclining at the different tables could see one another. In each of these compartments was a long, narrow table. Jesus reclined at the head of the middle one, His feet toward the fireplace. At the same table sat Israel, the bride's father, Lazarus, the male relatives of Jesus, and those of the bride. The other wedding guests, along with the disciples, sat at the two side tables. The women sat in the space back of the fireplace, but where they could hear all that Jesus said. The bridegroom served at table, assisted by the steward, who wore an apron, and by several servants. The women were waited upon by the bride and some maid servants.

When the viands were brought in, a roasted lamb, the feet bound crosswise, was set before Jesus. When the bridegroom brought to Jesus the little case in which lay the carving knife, Jesus bade him recall that children's entertainment after the Paschal feast, at which He had related the parable of a marriage, and had foretold to him that He would be present at his (the bridegroom's) marriage. These words were intended for Nathanael alone. On hearing them, he became very thoughtful, for he had quite forgotten the circumstance. Jesus was at the banquet as He had been during the whole celebration, very cheerful and always ready with a word of instruction. He accompanied every action with an explanation of its spiritual signification, and spoke of hilarity and the enjoyment of the feast. He remarked that the bow must not always be bent, that the field must sometimes be refreshed by rain, and upon each He uttered a parable. As He carved the lamb, most wonderful words fell from His lips. He spoke of separating the lambs from the flocks, not for the greater advantage of the little animals thus chosen, but that they should die. Then He alluded to the process of roasting in which the meat was divested of its rawness by the fire of purification. The carving of each member signified, as He said, the manner in which they who would follow the Lamb should separate from their nearest relatives according to the flesh. When to each one He had reached a piece and all were partaking of it, He said that the lamb had been separated from its companions and cut into pieces, that it might become in them a nourishment of mutual union, so too must he that would follow the Lamb renounce his own field of pasture, put his passions to death, and separate from the members of his family. Then would he become, as it were, a nourishment, a food, to unite by means of

the Lamb his fellow men to the Heavenly Father. Before every guest was a plate or a little wheaten cake. Jesus set a dark brown plate with a yellow rim before Himself, and it was afterward handed around. I saw Him at times holding up a little bunch of herbs in His hand, and giving some instruction upon it.

Jesus had engaged to supply the second course of the banquet as well as the wine, and for all this His Mother and Martha provided. This second course consisted of birds, fish, honey confections, fruits, and a kind of pastry which Veronica had brought with her. When it was all carried in and set on a side table, Jesus arose, gave the first cut to each dish, and then resumed His place at table. The dishes were served, but the wine failed. Jesus meanwhile was busy teaching. Now when the Blessed Virgin, who had provided for this part of the entertainment, saw that the wine failed, she went to Jesus and reminded Him that He had told her that He would see to the wine. Jesus, who was teaching of His Heavenly Father, replied: "Woman, be not solicitous! Trouble not thyself and Me! My hour is not yet come." These words were not uttered in harshness to the Blessed Virgin. Jesus addressed her as "Woman," and not as "Mother," because, at this moment as the Messiah, as the Son of God, He was present in divine power and was about to perform in presence of all His disciples and relatives an action full of mystery.

On all occasions when He acted as the Incarnate Word, He ennobled those that participated in the same by giving them the title that best responded to the part assigned them. Thus did the holiness of the divine action shed, as it were, some rays upon them and communicate to them a special dignity. Mary was the "Woman" who had brought forth Him whom now, as her Creator, she invokes on the occasion of the wine's failing. As the Creator, He will now give a proof of His high dignity. He will here show that He is the Son of God and not the Son of Mary. Later on, when dying upon the Cross, He again addressed His weeping Mother by the appellation of Woman, "Woman, behold thy son!" thereby designating John.

Jesus had promised His Mother that He would provide the wine. And here we see Mary beginning the role of that she has ever since continued. She places before Him the failure of the wine. But the wine that He was about to provide was more than ordinary wine; it was symbolical of that mystery by which He would one day change wine into His own Blood. The reply: "My hour is not yet come," contained three significations: first, the hour for supplying the promised wine; secondly, the hour for changing water into wine, thirdly, the hour for changing wine into His own Blood.

But Mary's anxiety for the wedding guests was now entirely relieved. She

had mentioned the matter to her Son, therefore she says confidently to the servants: "Do all that He shall tell you."

In like manner does the Church, the Bride of Jesus, say to Him: "Lord, Thy children have no wine." And Jesus replies: "Church" (not), "be not troubled, be not disquieted! My hour is not yet come." Then says the Church to her priests: "Hearken to His words, obey all His commands, for He will always help you!"

Mary told the servants to await the commands of Jesus and fulfill them. After a little while Jesus directed them to bring Him the empty jugs and turn them upside down. The jugs were brought, three water jugs and three wine jugs, and that they were empty was proved by inverting them over a basin. Then Jesus ordered each to be filled with water. The servants took them off to the well which was in a vault in the cellar, and which consisted of a stone cistern provided with a pump. The jugs were earthen, large and so heavy that when full it took two men to carry them, one at each handle. They were pierced at intervals from top to bottom by tubes closed by faucets. When the contents to a certain depth were exhausted, the next lower faucet opened to pour out. They were only tipped up on their high feet.

Mary's words to Jesus had been uttered in a low tone, but Jesus' reply, as well as His command to draw water, was given in a loud voice. When the jugs filled with water had been placed, six in number, on the side table, Jesus went and blessed them. As He retook His place at table, He called to a servant: "Draw off now, and bring a drink to the steward!" When this latter had tasted the wine, he approached the bridegroom and said: "Every man at first setteth forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse. But thou hast kept the good wine until now." He did not know that the wine was provided by Jesus as was also this whole course of the feast. That was a secret between the Holy Family and the family of the bridal pair. Then the bridegroom and the bride's father drank of the wine, and great was their astonishment. The servants protested that they had drawn only water, and that the drinking vessels and glasses on the table had been filled with the same. And now the whole company drank. The miracle gave rise to no alarm or excitement; on the contrary, a spirit of silent awe and reverence fell upon them. Jesus taught much upon this miracle. Among other things, He said that the world presents the strong wine first, and then deceives the partially intoxicated with bad drinks; but it was not so in the Kingdom that His Heavenly Father had given Him. There pure water was changed to costly wine, as lukewarmness should give place to ardor and intrepid zeal. He alluded also to that banquet at which in His twelfth year, after His return from teaching in the Temple, He had been present with many

of the guests now assembled, and who were then mere boys. He reminded them that He had on that occasion spoken of bread and wine, and had related the parable of a marriage at which the water of tepidity would be changed into the wine of enthusiasm. This, He said, was now fulfilled. He told them that they should witness greater miracles than this; that He would celebrate several Paschs, and at the last would change wine into Blood and bread into Flesh, and that He would remain with them till the end to strengthen and console. After that meal they should see happen to Him things that they could not now understand, even were He to explain them. Jesus did not say all this in plain terms. He hid it under parables, which I have forgotten, though I have given their sense. His listeners were filled with fear and wonder, and the wine produced a change in all. I saw that, not by the miracle alone, but also by the drinking of that wine, each one had received strength, true and interior, each had become changed. This change was similar to that wrought in them at an earlier stage of the entertainment by the eating of the fruit. His disciples, His relatives, in a word, all present were now convinced of Jesus' power and dignity, as well as of His mission. All believed in Him. Faith at once took possession of every heart. All became better, more united, more interior. This same effect was produced in all that had drunk of the wine,

At the close of the banquet, the bridegroom went to Jesus and spoke to Him very humbly in private. He told Him that he now felt himself dead to all carnal desires and that, if his bride would consent, he would embrace a life of continence. The bride also, having sought Jesus alone and expressed her wish to the same effect, Jesus called them both before Him. He spoke to them of marriage, of chastity so pleasing in the sight of God, and of the hundredfold fruit of the spirit. He referred to many of the Prophets and other holy persons who had lived in chastity, offering their bodies as a holocaust to the Heavenly Father. They had thus reclaimed many wandering souls, had won them to themselves as so many spiritual children, and had acquired a numerous and holy posterity. Jesus spoke all this in parables of sowing and reaping. The young couple took a vow of continence, by which they bound themselves to live as brother and sister for the space of three years. Then they knelt before Jesus, and He blessed them.

On the evening of the fourth day of the marriage, the bride and bridegroom were conducted to their home in festal procession. Lights arranged so as to form a letter were carried. Children went before carrying on strips of cloth two wreaths of flowers, an open one and a closed one, which they tore to pieces and scattered around in front of the house of the newly-married couple. Jesus had gone on ahead. He received them at the house and blessed

them. The priests also were present. Since the miracle wrought by Jesus at the banquet, they had become very humble, and gave Him precedence everywhere.

On the Sabbath spent at Cana, Jesus taught twice in the synagogue. He alluded to the wedding feast and to the obedience and pious sentiments of the bridal couple. On leaving the synagogue, He was accosted by the people, who threw themselves at His feet and implored Him to cure their sick. Jesus performed here two wonderful cures. A man had fallen from a high tower. He was taken up dead, all his limbs broken. Jesus went to him, placed the limbs in position, touched the fractures, and then commanded the man to rise and go to his home. The man arose, thanked Jesus, and went home. He had a wife and children. Jesus was next conducted to a man possessed by the devil, and whom He found chained to a great stone. Jesus freed him. He was next led to a woman, a sinner, who was afflicted by a bloody flux. He cured her, as also some others sick of the dropsy. He healed seven in all. The people had not dared to crowd around Him during the marriage festivities; but now that it was rumored that He was going away after the Sabbath, they could no longer be restrained. Since the miracle of the marriage feast, the priests did not interfere with Jesus. They allowed Him to do all that He wished. The miracles, the cures just related happened in their presence alone, for the disciples were not there.