

**Homily by Archbishop Dennis Schnurr
January 17, 2010**

**Second Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)
Closing liturgy for 175th Anniversary
Sisters of the Precious Blood
Salem Heights Chapel, Dayton**

We have just heard from the Gospel of John where he tells us about a day when Jesus took some water, plain ordinary water, and turned it into wine. We all know something about the process of making wine, and the more we contemplate the events at the wedding feast of Cana, the more our wonderment might grow. After all, it takes grapes to make wine. And more than that, it takes time to make wine. If you have grapes, you can make grape juice in a few minutes. But a good wine requires months, if not years, to produce. How could anyone do it in a matter of minutes, and without grapes?

Such questions, however, did not concern the evangelist, John. To him, the question was not how Jesus did it, but why he did it. What did it mean? Most of the miracles, which the Gospel writers attribute to Jesus, had a logical and immediate explanation. He healed the sick because they were sick. He fed the hungry because they were hungry. He raised the dead because – at least in the eyes of some – they had died prematurely.

Most of the miracles are accompanied by a sense of awe and amazement. But there is none of this in today's Gospel account. In fact, this water-into-wine miracle seems to have gone unnoticed by even the closest disciples of Jesus. Of the four gospels, John's Gospel is the only one to mention the wedding feast of Cana.

So, we may ask, why did John find this miracle so important? What did John see in it? It did not save a life. It did not restore health. It did not alleviate hunger. But John says of the event, "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee...." In other words, the real objective of the event at Cana is not the wine. The wine is only a sign, a symbol that points to something beyond itself. It is a revelation that carries a far deeper significance. Even to John, the water-to-wine event was a small miracle. For this reason, there is no sense of amazement in the Gospel account. At the same time, however, for John it is a small miracle with a great meaning.

His turning the water into wine is a sign of Jesus' transforming power. It is a whisper of things to come. It is equivalent to the proclamation found in the Book of Revelation: "Behold, I make all things new." (Rev. 21.5) Wine is the sign of joy and the sign of the transfiguration of creation. Wine removes our daily sadness and weariness and brings us together in celebration. Wine broadens the senses and the soul, loosens the tongue and opens the heart, breaks the barriers that constrain our existence.

In the Gospel story, after the jars have been filled with water, Jesus commands the waiters, “Draw some out.” The waiters probably saw it as a futile waste of time, since they presume it was tasteless water from a washing jar. Jesus also commands us to draw water because things are not always as they seem.

We cannot turn water into wine, but we all have the power to transform lives. The Mother of Jesus tells the waiters, “Do whatever he tells you.” To us this means: “conform your wills to the will of God — listen and be ready for his call. Recognize him as the Lord who points the way for you and who leads you on straight paths.”

When we do this, the words that we say and the things that we do are an extension and continuation of the ministry of Jesus who came “to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind [and] to let the oppressed go free.”

Jesus shows us how we can turn sorrow into joy and despair into hope. It was a small thing for him to turn water into wine. It is a small thing for us to give someone a pat on the back, a word of encouragement, an hour of our time, or a basket of food. These are seemingly small things, simple things. Yet, when guided in our service by the words of Jesus, what may seem like insignificant words and deeds become small miracles with great meanings.

Those same small miracles with great meanings have been evident with the Sisters of the Precious Blood for these past 175 years. From the founding of the congregation in Switzerland in 1834 by Maria Anna Brunner; to the first Sisters responding to Bishop Purcell’s request for missionaries to serve the German immigrants in the young Diocese of Cincinnati; to the establishment of the first Motherhouse at Maria Stein, a center of German population; to expanding ministries of teaching, domestic work and hours of Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament; to caring for orphans and the opening of the first Catholic Home for the Aging in Ohio; to the establishment of missions in Chile and Guatemala; the Sisters of the Precious Blood for 175 years have followed the path of Mother Brunner who trekked the difficult paths to the shrines in the Swiss mountains in order to discover the will of God. Mother Brunner heeded the message of Mary, “Do whatever he tells you.” Her followers continue that same path and outlook today.

The Archdiocese of Cincinnati has been richly blessed by the countless Sisters of the Precious Blood who have served the People of God in Southwest Ohio throughout these many years. You have transformed the lives of countless men, women, and children in the Archdiocese by being a “life-giving, reconciling presence in our fractured world.” We are grateful for your service and we are grateful for your witness to the values of the Gospel.

My prayer is, the prayer of the people of this Archdiocese is, that God will continue to bless your religious community in countless ways.

We pray too that, through your commitment to consecrated life, and through your prayer and service, you may continue to make present the small miracles with great meaning.