

SUNDAY 02 – YEAR C (Homily 02)

“Mary and the *Thin Place*”

(Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 96; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; John 2:1-12)

In his commentary on this Sunday’s readings in the *Living With Christ*, Anthony Chuzzi of Sudbury, Ontario, speaks of a Celtic concept known as a *thin place*. “This is a time, place or event in which, for a very brief moment,” he explains, “our humanity is embraced by the mystery of the divine and we are filled with the wonder of God. It can happen at the most unlikely time or in the very ordinary events of life.”

I resonated immediately with this description in recalling the death of my late brother Louis one year ago after a four year struggle with brain cancer. According to my sister-in-law Judy, he died in her arms without even a murmur, as she had prayed he would.

I believe that his faith in Jesus, his love for others and his years of suffering and pain had prepared him for death, and that the veil between this life and the next had become so thin for Louis that he simply slipped through that veil into eternal life without making a sound. This was an experience of that *thin place* for him and for us who journeyed with him.

Were we to truly enter into the spirit of this Sunday’s readings, this celebration, too, could be an experience of that thin place for us.

First, we hear the prophet Isaiah, almost like a quarter-horse straining against the restraints of the harness, trying to describe the indescribable future that he foresees for poor suffering Israel. He can only describe that future using terms of a marriage between God and Israel, a transformative relationship that brings exhilarating newness, total vindication, awesome beauty and profound delight to Israel.

We are then transported to the gospel, to, if you will, that *thin place*, where that very future foreseen by Isaiah, quietly, discreetly, almost secretly, begins to unfold before our eyes, through Mary and Jesus at a wedding feast in Cana.

I say Mary and Jesus because here, for St. John, Mary pointedly trumps Jesus. He proclaims first that the mother of Jesus was there, and then almost like an afterthought, tells us that Jesus and his disciples had also been invited. The focus is clearly on Mary and her role in this unfolding of salvation before our eyes this third day of a new creation that God was bringing about.

It is worth noting that Mary's titles, and not her name, is used. She is here Mother of Jesus and Woman only. Her role in salvation history is being presented as crucial to this experience of God in this "thin place" event. We are brought back to the annunciation where Mary is invited to participate in the mystery of salvation. She is not a pawn in the hand of God, an object to be used, but a respected and loved part of his creation that God invites.

According to Sr. Joan Chittister, in her book *In Search of Belief*, the central truth of the Annunciation was that Mary was not used. "Mary was not made a pawn in the birth of Christ. Mary was asked a question to which she had the right to say no. Mary was made a participant in the initiatives of God. God did not impose on Mary. Mary was not treated by God, as women generations after her have been, as a means to someone else's ends. Mary did not have life forced upon her. She was made ... a partner in the process. God asked a woman a question, something that happened only rarely thereafter. Mary chose to say yes. In the Scriptures, Mary is a strong woman who changes the course of human history, even reverses the nature of spirituality, as well as immerses herself in the Divine."

The title that Jesus uses in relating to his mother here is "woman" bringing to mind her role as the new Eve, through which a new creation would be brought about. The wedding feast at Cana was on the third day of this new creation, according to John. We are watching that brilliant future foreseen and prophesied by Isaiah, unfold before our eyes.

The role of Mary in this process continues to deepen. Chuzzi, in his description of the *thin place*, states that a wedding feast can be one of these thin places. The music, the food, the wine, the dancing, the love and commitment being celebrated, all speak at a deeper level of the love, compassion and unity of the mystery of the divine mingling with our humanity.

It is Mary who at this wedding notices the embarrassment of the young couple when the wine runs out. She takes action, places her faith in Jesus, goes to him and says simply, “They have no wine” and then to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” For Chittister again, “it is Mary who catapults Jesus into ministry there, and it is Mary who orchestrates the event. The woman who brought Jesus into a private world of marriage and family, now launches him into the public one for which she bore him. It is a woman who does it, not the apostles nor the rabbis there.” That should be food for thought for us as a church in terms of the role of women in the church.

Jesus then takes up her invitation, almost her command, and transforms six large jugs of water into the finest of wines. What a powerful image of what Jesus can do in our lives with our sins, our sinfulness, our limitations and our failures, if we believe in him and allow him.

The six water jars resonates with Hebrew numerology that held the number six to be a very weak number that never makes it to seven. The meaning here is that the old rituals and religion of the Jews can never transform humanity; this number points to the possibility of a seventh jar – fullness and perfection, who is Jesus himself.

Later in the gospel, at another table, Jesus invites us to be grafted onto another source of life, joy, beauty, covenant, and energy – Jesus himself, he who is the real vine. Grafted unto this vine, we will have within us the potential to produce fruit in and out of season, to tap into the seventh jar.

The use of these water jars indicates that the old ways of ritual purification are being replaced by the inner transformation that the Spirit of Jesus will bring. The drinking of wine in that culture did not have the association with alcoholism and alcohol abuse it does today. Jesus’ provision of an ample amount of wine puts him in the place of a host, generously and graciously providing “new wine of inner transformation” for his guests, those who will believe in him.

This new, choice, finest of wines that Jesus gives totally transforms the old water of formalized religion into a relationship with God characterized by joy and abundance. Everything is meant to emphasize the extravagance of the miracle that is to take place through the intercession of Mary, the mother of Jesus and our spiritual mother.

What are we waiting for? The thin place where we can, through humble faith and surrender to compassionate love, walk through and experience eternal life today, is before us right here and right now. Let us allow the prophecy of Isaiah be fulfilled in our time and space as it was at Cana.

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is our response, our “yes” to that invitation of Mary to do what he tells us, and to experience that new creation that God brought about through both Mary and Jesus.

May it be so for us as we celebrate this wedding feast of Cana today and every day.