

Novena to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart - 31 August to 8 September 2019

OUR LADY OF THE SACRED HEART: MOTHER-DISCIPLE

Day 3: Monday, 02 September – in the 22nd week in Ordinary Time

- 1 Thes 4:13-18 – We believe that Jesus died and rose again and it will be the same for those who have died in Jesus
- Pas 95: 1,3,4-5,11-13 – The Lord comes to judge the earth
- Luke 4: 16-30 –Jesus’ mission statement – The spirit of the Lord is upon me...

THE CANA IMPERATIVE

It is Monday and we are on day 3 of our Novena. Welcome back! Today’s Gospel reading shows us the beginning of Jesus’s public ministry according to the evangelist Luke. After the temptation in the desert, Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, returns to Galilee and began his public ministry. He comes to Nazareth, his home village, attends the Sabbath services and reads from the prophet Isaiah – a text many call Jesus’ mission statement – *“The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, and to proclaim the Lord’s year of favour.”* Fr Michael Fallon, a Missionary of the Sacred Heart from Australia, says in his commentary on the Gospel of Luke - “Luke chooses to open Jesus’ ministry in Nazareth. He wants to establish two central themes from the start. The first concerns the essence of Jesus’ mission, which is to be God’s word of grace to the poor; the second is that rejection cannot thwart God’s design.”¹

If this is the mission of Jesus, then we Christians, as his disciples, share in this same mission and we are reminded to persevere knowing that rejection cannot thwart God’s design. Yesterday, we said that Mary is mother-disciple, that in her call to be the mother of Jesus, she was also commissioned to be His disciple. This mission of Jesus then, do we also see it in the life of his mother-disciple?

To answer this question, I invite you at this point to cross over to another Gospel, the Gospel of John. In this Gospel, the evangelist gives us an entirely different story to mark the beginning of Jesus’s public ministry, it is in John chapter 2, the story of the wedding in Cana (Jn 2:1-12). As we all know, the mother of Jesus was there, as well as Jesus and his disciples. The story ends with Jesus turning water into wine – the first of his signs. Many of us are very familiar with this story and often, this story is used to prove the power of Mary’s intercession. We will not look at it that way today. Instead I would like to bring before you another way of reading and understanding the text, a way that I hope will help make this story real and effective for you and me, here and now.

First of all we note that in the story we are not told that the bride and the groom went to Mary to ask for her help. In fact, it seems that they did not even know themselves that the wine has run out. The text simply says “when the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, they have no wine.” For Elizabeth Johnson², “her words offer an intriguing portrait of a woman as a leader and catalyst in the mission of Jesus.” Mary sees that the wine has run out and so

¹ See http://mbfallon.com/luke_commentary/luke_4,14-8,56.pdf

² Elizabeth Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, pages 288-291

“acting in a decisive and confident manner, Mary named the need and took the initiative to seek a solution.” We imagine Mary in this scene, a woman who is sensitive to the needs of those around her; whose heart is moved by the need that she sees and thus acts on it. She went to Jesus and said to him, “they have no wine.”

We know that this statement from the mother of Jesus was not simply a statement of fact. Biblical scholars call it an implied request. And Jesus understood it this way and so his response was not - oh really, thanks for the information. No, Jesus heard the implied request and his response was “no”. “Woman, what concern is that to you or to me? My hour has not yet come.” But rejection cannot thwart God’s design. The mother of Jesus turns to the servants and says “Do whatever he tells you.” So Jesus said to them “Fill the jars with water.” Elizabeth Johnson says of the mother of Jesus - “Far from silent, she speaks; far from passive, she acts;...far from yielding to a grievous situation, she takes charge of it, organizing matters to bring about benefit to those in need.”

And her instruction to the servants is wise, “Do whatever he tells you.” She is able to communicate her conviction that her Son can and will do something about it but does not go to the extent of dictating what Jesus must do. It is still Jesus who decides what to do, still Jesus who meets the situation of need before him. His mother saw the need and directed the servants to Jesus - do whatever he tells you.

What is the relevance of the Cana story for us today? Johnson says “this challenging plea from the mother of Jesus addresses the conscience of the body of Christ today...they have no wine, no food, no clean drinking water, you need to act!” - the Cana Imperative. Look around you, can you see the many people fleeing violence and poverty from their own lands, crossing seas and rivers to find a better place to live in, they have no homes, no security...do something! Listen to our common home, our planet earth, it is crying out in pain...do something! Pay attention to the women and men living with you or near you, children and adults, those in your homes, those in your places of work....what situations of need do you see... within your circumstances and capacities, given whatever resources you may have...is there something you can do...then do something!

Many times, we find ourselves before seemingly impossible situations that render us hopeless and helpless ...yet in these situations we hear the Cana Imperative. Let me share with you two such situations from home. As you probably know, the Philippines is visited by typhoons many times in a year and every now and then, big ones come. In 2008, a big one hit Manila, typhoon Ondoy. 80% of the capital was under water and we were glued to our TV sets watching homes taken by the water. One of our sisters, her name is Cetah, left the TV room, went to the laundry and started washing clothes. Well, she thought, many people are losing everything they own. We have used clothing in the basement, maybe these will help. We saw a hopeless situation. She did something. True enough, the next day, some of our lay associates came, they have neighbours who lost everything, they need clothes. Thanks to Cetah, we had clean newly washed clothes to give. “They have no wine...do something about it!”

Another sister, her name is Betty, was assigned in one of the cities in the southern part of the Philippines, Surigao. When she went to the public market to do her shopping, there were these little children asking for alms. She had nothing to give them and she felt frustrated and helpless. She heard the Cana Imperative – they have no wine, do whatever he tells you! What to do? Betty decided one day to talk to the children and asked them to take her with

them where they live and what she saw was overwhelming. These children belong to an indigenous Filipino group called Badjao. They build their houses on water. In Surigao, Betty found out that they are not registered as residents. The children do not go to school. The mothers are also illiterate. What to do? Betty decided to start a feeding and tutorial program in the place (first on her own). Both mothers and children needed to be fed and tutored. Later, Betty got a lay woman to work with her, as a volunteer and then even got an Australian lay woman, a teacher, to visit the community, bring some teaching materials, and teach her and her volunteers creative ways of teaching. What Betty started is now a congregational ministry. They have no wine...do something about it!

The mother of Jesus in Cana is Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, the “woman” disciple of Jesus who is addressing us, the body of Christ, today... they have no wine...do whatever he tells you! And what is he telling us to do? Today’s Gospel reading lays it out before us very clearly ... “Bring the good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives, and to the blind new sight, set the downtrodden free, and proclaim the Lord’s year of favour.”

We are making this Novena because, like Mary, we see situations of need. Our petition boxes are full of these “needs” and we are doing something, we are praying for them; we are saying to Jesus, look, they have no wine. As we continue with this Novena, let us listen intently to Jesus, maybe he wants us to do something more. Maybe he is asking us to do something simple, like washing some clothes or filling some jars with water.

As we receive his body in Holy Communion today, may we also receive his Spirit that we may be able to do whatever he tells us. Amen.