

XVII: (see outline with John) Hermeneutics and the gospel of John. The “theologian”, John soars with his usage of signs throughout his gospel (cf. word of the week on *signs*). We will carefully examine two very rich images as they come out of the inauguration of his public ministry in the Wedding Feast at Cana. Let us first remember that John uses things familiar to explain things that are unfamiliar (“in the beginning”; days; light and dark; “woman” as the first expression of man). What John does is call upon the OT to give direction and purpose to his whole gospel.

A. The Wedding Feast at Cana: *“On the threshold of his public life Jesus performs his first sign-at the mother’s request-during a wedding feast. The Church attaches great importance to Jesus’ presence at the Wedding at Cana. She sees in it the confirmation of the goodness of marriage and the proclamation that thenceforth marriage will be an efficacious sign of Christ’s presence”* (CCC, 1613). The nuptial covenant between man and woman is a sign of the covenant established between Christ and his bride, the Church. To understand one wedding feast we must understand the other (cf. Rev.19:7)

1. Jn.2.1... *“the third day.”* Chronologically this refers to the third day since the encounter with Nathaniel. Theologically this refers to the seventh day. Note how the beloved disciple places the third day on the succession of the other days: 1.29; 1.35; 1.43.

a. John wishes for the reader to see that the creation fashioned in seven days is being renewed and transformed in and through Jesus Christ via the new covenant in the marriage feast.

b. Jesus manifests his glory on the third day in the wedding Feast, but also prepares the reader for another great manifestation--the Resurrection.

1. The Third day was the Theophany in the Old Testament.

2. Jn.2.2-4... *“Woman, what have you to do with me... My hour has not yet come”*

Although it might offend the standards of modern etiquette, this was a title of respect and endearment in antiquity (Jn.19.25-27; Rev.12 for further understanding of the role of the ‘woman’).

a. Mary reverses the fortunes of the fall in the garden. As Eve prompted Adam to defy the Lord and drag the human race into sin, so Mary prompts Jesus, the new Adam, into His mission of salvation.

b. *‘What is that to you or me’* is a Hebrew idiom rendered in the Gk. The meaning is flexible and must be understood in its greater context.

1. This particular idiom speaks to the free consent of one party to the expressed will of another, with or without a sense of reluctance. Note that Jesus promptly replies to her consent and thus the first sign of his new dispensation--the sacramental church.

3. Jn.2.4b... *“My hour has not yet come”*. This statement seems exaggerated unless the provision of wine was somehow connected to Mary’s petition. This points to the whole meaning of Christ’s purpose, which was the appointed hour of Christ’s passion (cf. Jn.7:30) and its direct correlation to the liturgy, the new wine (and the Wedding Feast at Cana). The hour is liturgical because it points to the sacrifice, and is caught up in the language of our Liturgy

a. Jn.2:1-11: we receive new wine at the occasion of a miracle (anticipating the wine of the Mass as the Marriage Supper of the Lamb).

b. Jn.4:23-24: we are empowered to worship in spirit and truth (anticipating the power given to us to worship in spirit and truth of the Liturgy)...Christ’s meeting with the Samaritan Woman.

c. Jn.5:25: We hear God’s word to receive new life (anticipating the Liturgy of the Word)...after repentance and forgiveness.

d. Jn.4:23; 12:20; 13:1: we gather as a universal people to celebrate the new Passover (anticipating the Catholic Liturgy of the Lamb of God).

e. Jn. 12:23-24.: We receive the living bread, the fruit of the grain of wheat that has died (anticipating the Eucharist).

f. Jn.12:32: The Lamb of God will be lifted up drawing all men unto himself.

**** A martyr's meal: Polycarp and Ignatius's "hour"...read from the didache.

4. **Jn.2.5...** *"Do whatever he tells you."* Mary's last words are mediating the divine life of the sacramental church. This is her spiritual testament as our mother.
 - a. Gn.41.55...The command to follow Jesus echoes the same command to follow Joseph. The Patriarch went on to provide bread in abundance during a time of famine. Therefore, it is that Jesus provides bread in abundance for the people of God.
5. **Jn.2.6...** *"six stone jars."* The purpose of these jars is outlined in Nm.19.11-22, which stipulates that any Israelite defiled by contact with the dead must be purified with water on the third day and then again on the seventh day. The event at Cana takes place on the third and seventh day.
 - a. Jesus first miracle was the changing of the water into wine...the first miracle of Moses the water into blood.
6. **Jn.2.9...** *"the bridegroom."* The unidentified groom at the wedding is what Jesus fulfills at the spiritual level.
 - a. Mt.25.1-13; Rev.1.1; 19.7 (CCC 796)...Marriage Feast is the highest identity of the Eucharist in its Truth in the covenant.
7. **Jn.2 10...** *"the good wine."* This was a biblical symbol with many associations.
 - a. A sign of the messianic age (Is.25.6; Joel 3.18; Amos 9.13).
 - b. It signifies the joys of marital love (Song 1.2; 4.10; 7.9).
 - c. The anticipation of the transubstantiation (1 Cor.10.16).

B. The Wine: The Fruit of the Vine: The metaphor of the vine underscores Jesus' union with his disciples and their absolute dependence on him for life and growth. Let us jump to chapter 15 of John because Christ delivers this sermon on the occasion of the Last Supper, giving it Eucharistic coloring. Certainly, this is highlighted by Christ's usage of "abide" (Jn.6:56, 15:4-5). John is well aware of the synoptic use of "the fruit of the vine" seen during the Eucharistic meal (cf. Mt.26:29, Mk.14:25, Lk.22:18) (CCC, 767). Now let us take a closer look at the Vine and the Branch.

1. The Vine and the Branch and its implication based upon our understanding of the nature of the Vine and the Branch. It is an organic image that communicates a grafting of one thing to another; a fusion of two things coming together with one purpose. By nature, its organic function is based entirely upon the branch clinging to the vine, that the vine may transfer its life-giving substance (sap) to the branch.
 - a. In light of Christ as the True Vine, there is no sharper image and analogy in Scripture that communicates more insight into man's call to be poor in spirit than that of the branch becoming one with the vine. Just as the Vine gives itself away for the sake of its branches to produce fruit, so does Christ give himself away to man so that he would produce much fruit; a fruit that comes from the same kind of grafting and fusion to that of the Vine and the Branch.
 - a. The Pruning Knife: As we follow Jesus and come to know him personally, we find him calling us to submit to the pruning knife, to cut out some things from our lives that are good in themselves and that would even have had the potential to develop into fruit bearing branches, in order that other things might flourish. Pruning is always a painful process. It is a form of loss or death. The vinedresser is never more intimately involved than when wielding the pruning knife. JP II cues the call to conversion and evangelization in his Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*.
2. *Christifideles Laici* was an exhortation to all the lay faithful to realize their vocation to personal holiness for the sanctity of the world. In one of his most forward points to the lay faithful regarding the task of mission, John Paul II stated: "the lay faithful have an essential and irreplaceable role in the mission of the Church. Through them, the Church of Christ is made present in the world as a sign and source of hope and love"-CL
 - a. The call to be "children in the Son"

b. *Lumen Gentium*: “The true vine is Christ who gives life and the power to bear abundant fruit to the branches, that is, to us, who through the Church remain in Christ without whom we can do nothing” (LG, 6). So to abide in Christ is to abide in the Church. John Paul II in *Christifideles Laici* developed this to deliberate on how our identity of Christ is rooted in our communion with the Church. Communion with the Church comes in the consistent participation in her sacramental life; participation by obedience and understanding of her doctrine; and participation by mutual fellowship and prayer to build one another up in Christ.

1. John Paul II concludes his Exhortation to the lay faithful with a message that lies at the heart of the new evangelization: “the call to growth and a continual process of maturation, of always bearing much fruit” (CL, 57) The “vitality” of man is dependent upon the willingness to be cut back for the sake of the vineyard. This call to be ‘vital’ by “pruning” back brings us back to the summons of becoming new for the sake of other, and in the metaphor of the vine and branch, becoming new for the sake of the vineyard. This organic metaphor, which illustrates so strikingly our vocation to be grafted to Christ, has with it at its core a Eucharistic dimension. The activity of Christ must have the very physical indwelling of Christ for their to be the regenerative force of Christ.

3. The Eucharist: John Paul II stated: “in the symbol of the True Vine” the branch is verdant and fruitful only if it is grafted on to the vine stem, from which it receives sap and support (Jn 15:1-7)...Here we see a unity, a communion, which is realized between the faithful and Christ present in the Eucharist, on the basis of the principle that Paul expresses this way: “Those who eat the sacrifices are partners in the altar” (1 Cor.10:18).

a. A mutual interiority: “He in me and I in Him”

b.. In deliberating on the Vine and the Branch as an image to better understand our communion with Christ, Pope Benedict XVI has some key words for reflection towards understanding *abiding* as the essential piece to the fruit that we are called to produce in the vineyard:

“In verses 1-10 (of Jn. 15) the word remain (abide) occurs ten times (in Greek menein). What the Church Fathers call patient steadfastness in communion with the Lord in all the vicissitudes of life-is placed center stage here. Initial enthusiasm is easy. Afterward though, it is time to stand firm, even along the monotonous desert paths that we are called upon to traverse in this life—with the patience it takes to tread evenly, a patience in which the romanticism of the initial awakening subsides, so that only the deep, pure yes of faith remains. This is the way to produce good wine” (JN, 261).

c. In these words, Pope Benedict XVI establishes what a ‘steadfast’ relationship ought to look like in the turbulence of everyday life. Just as our earthly courtships possess a romantic coloring yet dwindle over time to only be sustained through the gift of self, so should our heavenly courtship with Christ, though romanticized early on, have all the etchings of sacrificial love. If we are to produce good fruit and share in the mission of Christ, then it demands we faithfully ‘remain’ in Christ by participating (koinonia) in the one sacrifice of Christ in the Eucharist. Consequently, all of Christian humanism rests upon the existential need to abide in spiritual poverty—that christocentric mindset that sees our need for him in all things.

*** come full circle in the sharing of the fruit of the vine: the wine that comes from being pressed/crushed into its new product!!!!!!!!!!!!