

Pusey House  
Epiphany 2, 18<sup>th</sup> January, 2016  
The Principal  
2 Kings 4.1-17, Psalm 107.13-22, Romans 12.6-16a, John 2.1-11

***This beginning of signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.***

The Gospel is an Epiphany, a shining forth of the grace of Christ. In the miracle of water made wine, we see the power of God transforming the material creation, and symbolising the hope that the same Lord will transform human life from the inside out. It is an Epiphany of divine love and goodness.

The following is the account of another epiphany in the life of the Catholic monk Bede Griffiths who spent much of his later life in an ashram in India.<sup>1</sup> He describes here an experience of conversion, which is fundamentally a kind of Epiphany. He sees the natural world as a sacrament of the divine grace, and sees nature shining with the divine light.

“One day during my last term at school I walked out alone in the evening and heard the birds singing in that full chorus of song, which can only be heard at that time of the year at dawn or at sunset. I remember now the shock of surprise with which the sound broke in my ears. It seemed to me that I had never heard the birds singing before and I wondered whether they sang like this all the year round and I had never noticed it.

“As I walked on I came upon some hawthorn trees in full bloom and again I thought that I had never ever seen such a sight or experienced such sweetness before. If I had been brought suddenly among the trees of the Garden of Paradise and heard a choir of angels singing I could not have been more surprised.

“I came then to where the sun was setting over the playing fields.

“A lark rose suddenly from the ground beside the tree where I was standing and poured out its song above my head, and then sank, still singing, to rest. Everything then grew still as the sunset faded and the veil of dusk began to cover the earth. I remember now the feeling of awe which came over me. I felt inclined to kneel on the ground, as though I had been standing in the presence of an angel; and I hardly dared to look on the face of the sky, because it seemed as though it was but a veil before the face of God.”

Pusey described this reality from a more theological point of view when he took up the theme of the natural world as another book alongside the book of God’s word. All created things, says Pusey, are ‘as uttered by God, speak of God Who spoke them; they are syllables of that Eternal Voice which spake them’. The great 16<sup>th</sup> c English divine Richard Hooker described all created things as ‘partakers of God’, ‘they are his offspring’, and as being such they must) bear a certain impress and image of the unseen God. And yet, however wonderful is this stamp of God in the material creation, it is more distant, less intimate, less full of promise, than the communion and union of the Son of God with humanity which is manifest in Gospel for today.

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<sup>1</sup> quoted in Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*. Bede Griffiths (17 December 1906 – 13 May 1993), born Alan Richard Griffiths and also known as Swami Dayananda (Bliss of Compassion), was a British-born Benedictine monk who lived in ashrams in South India. “We’re now being challenged to create a theology which would use the findings of modern science and eastern mysticism which, as you know, coincide so much, and to evolve from that a new theology which would be much more adequate.”

St John describes this beginning of signs as the ἀρχὴ of signs. This archi, this beginning is not just a beginning in time, it is the origin, the summing up in Christ of all the signs which he will perform.

Part of the reason why the debates about marriage in the Church are so heated is because they touch on fundamental realities which we see and grasp only imperfectly. In the OT, the relationship of God to His people, is often described as a kind of marriage. The Song of Songs pictures this relationship in the most intimate and surprising of images: ***Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine.*** These images will guide us here in our journey through Lent, with the choir singing a selection of motets based on the Song.

In the New Testament, the parables of Christ are full of descriptions of a wedding feast, a wedding feast at which he is the bridegroom, and at which he is the sacrifice. At the very beginning of his public ministry, the miracle of water made wine is a kind of parable in action.

In other words, it is not just the miracle which is a sign, the occasion itself, the wedding feast is a sign. Saint Paul, after he says that, in marriage a man and a woman become one flesh, goes on to write: ‘This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church’ (Eph 5). When the Son of God took on flesh and dwelt among us, He married human nature to Himself.

Bede Griffiths felt inclined to kneel when he glimpsed something of the face of God through a veil. He saw the creator manifest in creature. We are invited to see something more wonderful still, the creator united his creation, in some way married to the creation so that it may be made to shine with the divine light. In the early Church, the celebration of the first sign, the transformation of water into wine, was one of the three great epiphanies which cluster around the nativity. The choir will sign a version of this prayer as a communion anthem

*Today the bridegroom claims his bride, the Church,  
since Christ has washed away her sins in Jordan’s waters;  
Today, the Magi hasten with their gifts to the royal wedding;  
and Today the wedding guests rejoice, for Christ has changed water into wine,  
alleluia.*

This version of the prayer sees both the baptism and the visit of the magi through the lens of divine marriage. In his baptism, Christ foreshadowed that ‘washing of water by the word’ by which, on the cross, he wed his bride the Church: *Today the bridegroom claims his bride, the Church, since Christ has washed away her sins in Jordan’s waters;*

But what is the *royal wedding to which the Magi hasten with their gifts?*

In Himself, in the infant in Bethlehem and in the Bridegroom who comes to the wedding, heaven and earth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other. His very person is a perfect marriage of the human and divine. In Him, human nature is, en-godded, deified, taken up and give a share in the divine life.

If we begin to glimpse all that the sign sums us, all that it contains, we see also that we are guests at this wedding. Indeed, we are more than guests, we are, the words of Bernard of Clairvaux, we are the Spouse: *‘For we are, all of us, invited to spiritual nuptials, in which the Bridegroom is none other than Christ the Lord: .... And we are the Spouse . . . all together we are one Spouse in the body of Christ, and each single one of us is a Spouse’*

The sign of water made wine pictures the divine marriage, and it pictures of the purpose of that marriage. Sitting gazing at a bust of John Keble last evening at Keble College encouraged me to add this morning Keble's wonderful summary of the message of the sign:

“The beginning of all His Miracles; a token, which way they all tended... to change the worse into the better : water to Wine; the Law to the Gospel; sinners into Saints, and men into Angels! So it is all through the Christian Religion, all thorough the Services and Sacraments of the Holy Catholic Church. Every where, and in all things, the grace of Almighty God is working some miraculous and merciful change, on something or other which men willingly offer to Him.

The Epistle offers a wonderful description of what human life comes to look like when it is transformed by the good wine of the divine grace:

***Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; ... not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer...***

This is a simple and beautiful description of the inward transformation which is the work of divine grace in us. To love with genuineness, to show a real and deep respect for others, to have a kind of hopeful joy in the worst kind of trials, to despise what is evil and destructive: these are pictures of the wine of divine grace.

How does this happen? How does the promise of the miracle become real for us. I will make two suggestions.

***...when the wine failed, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine...*** This is a kind of metaphor for what is missing in life, for what we need in order love without dissimulation, to rejoice in hope. Our Lord's mother directs the servants simply, Do whatever he tells you. To give the new wine, the Lord Jesus uses stone jars which are in the room for rites of purification. The water in these jars invite us to here again the message of John the Baptist who called the people of Jerusalem to a baptism of repentance. Do whatever he tells you requires a turning toward God, a movement toward purification. Our loves must be made pure and good. This obedience, this turning, is a kind of beginning. In Richard Hooker's rendition of Aquinas, Nature hath need of grace, ... but grace hath use of nature'.

We may not feel confident about the gifts we bring to the marriage, we may be all to aware of our weakness. Our repentance is often weak, our desire for the good things put before us watery. But in the marriage in which we are the spouse, no good thing is lost, and no effort in the direction of virtue or truth comes back empty: by God's grace, water is changed to wine: Nature hath need of grace, ... but grace hath use of nature'.

***Do whatever he tells you.*** In the most basic way, this command is embodied in the Eucharist. our hope for transformation, for power to change, is not rooted in what we do, but what in Christ does for us. In this service, we come to hear the Word who took on flesh speak to us in the human words which he took on. According to his command, we seek to love one another in prayer, to support one another in doing what he commands. In the Eucharist, we do what he commands us to do. The one who made the water to be wine makes the wine to be the wedding cup of his blood shed for us.

When the altar is prepared, a little water is mixed with the wine, picturing the water of human nature which our Lord mixes with the wine of his divinity. The ordinary gifts

are offered to God, and by the word of Christ, they are given back to us as his body and his blood. We don't just see the sign, we are invited ourselves to drink not only the better wine, but the best of all possible wine.

In the miracle of Cana of Galilee, our Lord changes more than 120 gallons of water into wine. It is a miracle of super-abundance. The Greek version of Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd, describes the excellence of the intoxicating cup. I will leave you with the words of St Ambrose, teacher of St Augustine, and his invitation to drink from the intoxicating cup which is Christ:

Blessed inebriation. which infuseth joy, bringeth not confusion; blessed inebriation, which esestablisheth the walk of the sober mind; blessed inebriation, which bedeweth with the gift of life eternal.

Drink, then, that Cup whereof the Prophet speaks, "Thy inebriating Cup, how excellent is it." Drink Christ, because He is the Vine; drink Christ, because He is the Rock which poured out water; drink Christ, because He is the Fountain of Life; drink Christ, because He is the stream whose flowing gladdeneth the city of God; drink Christ, because He is peace; drink Christ, because out of His bowels shall flow rivers of living water; drink Christ, that thou mayest drink the Blood wherewith thou wert redeemed; drink Christ, that thou mayest drink His words; His word is the Old Testament, His word is the New Testament. Drink, then, speedily, that "a great light" (Is. ix. 1, 2) may dawn upon thee, not an every-day light, not of the day, not the sun, not the moon, but that light which removeth the "shadow of death!"

Let us pray for something of the vision which opened the eyes of Bede Griffiths to see the divine light in creation, to see the gift of human life and human community transformed by the light which shines first in Christ, but which shines also in the Church and in the world.