

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

There's Glory For You!

Water into wine. A divine operation, which has been conceded by the Almighty to a great coalition of his creatures: the soils of Burgundy, the Médoc, Piedmont and Tuscany (and a few other less significant places): the noble *vitis vinifera*, or grape vine, and the industrious vintners who look on with a vague sense of miracle as the juice of their fruit transforms itself into the mystic gift of wine. I always think with a quiver of awe that what glugs out of my bottle of Marcenasco was once a grey mess in the skies above Alba, before it fell on the sacred soil of the Barolo vineyards, to be drunk by a thirsty Nebbiolo vine, and channelled into the sun-devouring lantern of a lustrous black grape. How wonderful are your ways, Lord God Almighty, who bring forth wine from the earth, to cheer our heart!

A Time Of Feasts

I hope nothing happened to darken the experience of your annual time of feasting. Even given the "live simply" campaign, and the terror of world injustice, the obesity, the addiction, the waste, the evils of gluttony and drunkenness and debt, the command to feast is still laid upon us regularly in the Bible and in the Church. And we shouldn't let anything rob us of the readiness to obey. God wants us to know how to be happy, to live with joy at our right hand, to share welcome and generosity, to spend what we have gladly for one another. There is a lovely passage (denied, sadly, to our Protestant brethren, whose Bible excludes it) in Ecclesiasticus 14: *If someone is mean to himself, whom does he benefit? He does not even enjoy what is his own. No-one is meaner than the person who is mean to himself...the miser is grudging of his bread: there is famine at his table.* We're made to feel so guilty about enjoyment, that we lose the taste for living. Jesus was famous for feasting - even when others were piously holding back. In the feast was an Epiphany: and our Gospel tells us so today.

Not Just A Sad Accident

The Scriptures have always treasured the image of a feast: not just a long ceremony, followed by a thin dish of holy gruel and an early night, but a real good go, with massive roasts and gravy, fresh fruit and wine in torrents, spice and honey and cakes. I'm sure the little marriage-feast at Cana did what it

best could to lay in enough for a feast; you only get married once, or so we hope. So what when the awful truth dawns: "Is that all there is left? You must have lost a few bottles; are you sure? What are we to do?" Mary is quick-eyed, and turns straight to her son. One hears the sympathy and generosity in her voice: *They have no wine.* Jesus responds with unexpected solemnity, addressing his mother as God addressed Eve: *Woman, why turn to me, before my hour strikes?* The solemn question is from the Messiah, who will inaugurate the great banquet for the wedding of heaven and earth, when the mountains will stream with wine, milk and honey...and that's the key to the whole story.

"Do Whatever He Tells You!"

Mary obediently delivers all things into the hand of her son. We should hear the same command in all our passes and crises. But he has more to teach us yet. He chooses a sign: he has spotted the tall water-jars at the back of the dining-room, ritual jars for the ceremonial washing of hands in a Jewish meal. Were they in great requisition, in casual Galilee, whose religion was a bit lax? I doubt it! But on a wedding-day there they are. Jesus uses a very specific command: he tells the servants to "fulfil" the jars - as one "fulfils" a commandment. And they fill them to the brim. It is this "fulfilment" that opens the way to the banquet of the Messiah. And sure enough it has arrived; it slowly dawns on the company that 180 gallons of a wine that eclipses anything else they've tasted has suddenly arrived at this little village wedding. Epiphany! The manifestation from above, the appearing of the Messiah. *He let his glory be seen....*not by doing a conjuring-trick with some jars, but by transforming a little family feast into a transcendent celebration of the divine presence, a taste of the eternal.

The Bridegroom Is With Us

Christmas and Epiphany fall behind us; let's not lose the nuptial joy they have celebrated. *How could they fast, when the bridegroom is still with them?* Soon enough Lent will come, with its sober call to fasting. But we must still show to the world bright eyes, expectant hearts, ready sympathies, open doors, a trustful outlook, and the gladness of guests at the Lord's table. *Fr Philip*