

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
The Third Sunday after the Epiphany¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the eleventh Chapter of Hosea [**hoh-ZAY-uh**].³

“When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim [**BAY-uh-limb**], and burned incense to graven images. I taught Ephraim [**EE-frih-eem**] also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them.

“He shall not return into the land of Egypt, and the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return. And the sword shall abide on his cities, and shall consume his branches, and devour them, because of their own counsels. And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him. How shall I give thee up, Ephraim [**EE-frih-eem**]? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah [**ODD-mah**]? how shall I set thee as Zeboim [**zih-BOH-ihm**]? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim [**EE-frih-eem**]: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city. They shall walk after the LORD: he shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west. They shall tremble as a bird out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria: and I will place them in their houses, saith [**SETH**] the LORD. Ephraim [**EE-frih-eem**] compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit: but Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints.

“Ephraim [**EE-frih-eem**] feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind: he daily increaseth lies and desolation; and they do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt. The LORD hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him.

“He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God: Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel [**BETH-ell**], and there he spake with us; Even the LORD God of hosts; the LORD is his memorial. Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment and wait on thy God continually.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the second Chapter of the Gospel According to St. John.⁴

“And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith [**SETH**] unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith [**SETH**] unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith [**SETH**] unto you, do it. And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith [**SETH**] unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith [**SETH**] unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, And saith [**SETH**] unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast

⁵ St. John 7:30 (KJV).

⁶ St. John 8:20 (KJV).

⁷ St. John 12:23, 27 (KJV).

⁸ St. John 16:32 (KJV).

⁹ St. John 17:1 (KJV).

¹⁰ F. J. SHEEN, THE LIFE OF CHRIST 77 (1961).

¹¹ *Ibid.* 78.

¹² Genesis 3:14, 15 (KJV).

¹³ Rector, St. Benedict's Anglican Catholic Church, Chapel Hill, NC.

kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.

“After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples: and they continued there not many days.

“And the Jews’ passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father’s house an house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.

“Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest [**SHOW-est**] thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.

“Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

Today we will look at three important things meant to be drawn out, exegeted, from the portion of the Gospel of John that forms today's Second Lesson. These are:

- 1) Christ's presence at a wedding
- 2) His phrase "my hour"
- 3) The title that he gives to His mother, namely, "Woman."

The mysterion of matrimony.

First, let us consider His presence at a wedding. We know that the Lord is present in a very special way whenever a couple performs the sacrament of marrying each other with the blessing of the Church. Saint Paul calls the marriage union the "mystery" of Christ and His Church, and by the use of the word "mystery" (μυστήριον, *mystērion*) the scriptures tell us that this is a sacrament. We know that a sacrament conveys the grace of God, each according to His plan and purpose, a special and specific grace. The grace of the marital union is specific and has everything to do with our hope for a future and for new life.

We can say, with both scripture and reason on our side, that the Lord is not present in any meaningful way in unions outside of marriage. Certainly, they lack the grace of the sacrament, and even among non-Christians they are not conformable to God's laws. They have instead the nature of sin. But in our time such non-marital unions are treated by society as acceptable. This is an area where the Church has no right and no authority to take the side of popular "culture." We must be different. **Whatever the world is teaching and doing, Christian parents, remember: You must teach your children to wait until marriage.**

to sin and death. The Lord's heel was bruised for our sake, and the power of Satan was overthrown. Sin was killed by the Cross, and death was slain by His Resurrection.

The whole of idea using the word "seed," (זֶרַע, *zera*) that is, the woman's seed, is to express a miracle, that a woman would conceive without a natural father. He, the Son of the virgin mother, is the seed of the woman, spoken of by God in the first promise ever revealed that He would save us from sin and death.

For he does not damn Adam and Eve in the third chapter of Genesis; instead he makes this promise. So, in the Gospel, Mary is not simply any woman, but rather she is *the* Woman, because Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world.

So we have seen:

- 1) Christ's presence at a wedding;
- 2) His phrase "my hour";
- 3) The title that he gives to His mother, namely, "Woman."

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The Rev'd Robert Hart¹³
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¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Mass on the Third Sunday after the Epiphany, 2010.

² *An Alternative Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised in 1928)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, WITH THE ADDITIONS AND DEVIATIONS PROPOSED IN 1928 33 (Canterbury Press 2008); *The Table of Lessons (The Table of 1922, As Revised In 1928)*, A BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxiv (South Africa 1954); *A Table of Lessons (authorized by the Episcopal Synod)*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxii (CIPBC 1963).

³ Hosea 11:1-12:6 (KJV).

⁴ St. John 2:1-25 (KJV).

Finally, what of this curious title that He gives to His mother? Here at Cana, as He works that first miracle that would lead to His being “despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief... cut off out of the land of the living” “for the sins of the whole world,” He calls her “Woman.” One more time He would call her that. On the day of His death as she stood by helplessly, with the sword piercing her own soul, He said: “Woman, behold thy Son.”

Perhaps to the modern American ear this has no meaning. But to the ancient Jews, educated in the Scriptures, it was obvious, indeed it was rich in meaning. This comes from the *Proto Evangelium*, the first announcement of the Gospel. In the third chapter of the Book of Genesis, after the fall of Adam into the sin and death that passed to all mankind, God spoke to the serpent the words of his coming defeat:

“And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”¹²

The Lord Jesus identified Himself as the “seed of the woman.” His heel was bruised, that is He died, but He could not be held by death; and so He rose on the third day. The serpent’s head was bruised, that is, the prince of this world was cast out in the judgment that was rendered, by the Lord’s Cross, on the world’s system of sin.

The entire dominion of Satan was destroyed by the Cross of Christ, the entire oppressive usurpation of rebellion against the Maker and Ruler of all things, destroyed like the armies of Pharaoh, so that we might be set free from slavery

The problem is, people treat the ultimate human relationship, the kind that alone brings forth new life, as a casual thing, and as something to be subject to experimentation. They experiment by living as if they were married; and when such a couple decides that it is finally safe to get married, they have become accustomed to the idea of the experiment; and that idea never goes away.

No wonder that such couples have a high divorce rate, as, indeed, the statistics show. They failed to learn certain important facts. First of all, marriage is not an experiment, but a commitment. Second, any human relationship that is experimental must fail at some time, because everybody is impossible to live with. If you do not consider yourself impossible to live with, than read the Epistle to the Romans and take note of Saint Paul’s description of what a sinner you are, and wise up.

Finally, marriage is not simply a commitment two people make to each other, but a commitment two people make to God, with faith that He is making the same commitment to them, and that (in the words from Ecclesiastes) “a threefold cord is not easily broken.” For the occasion of joy, when a couple begins to live in the sacrament of matrimony, the Lord is present.

The seed of the woman.

“Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.”

The way this sounds to modern ears, “What have I to do with thee?” is a bit misleading. The way to understand it is simply, “what is there to be done between you and Me?” That is, what did the two of them have as a matter of mutual concern?

For this second point, I am grateful for a book by one of the genuine lights of the Roman Catholic Church here in America in the 20th Century, Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen. His commentary on this part of the Gospel of John, in his classic 1961 book *Life of Christ*, highlights one simple phrase and draws out the meaning with clarity. What did our Lord mean by “Mine hour is not yet come,” that enigmatic line He spoke to His mother? In the other places in the Gospel of John that speak specifically of His hour, the meaning has to do with His cross, the time of His death:

*“Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his **hour** was not yet come.”⁵*

*“These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as he taught in the temple: and no man laid hands on him; for his **hour** was not yet come.”⁶*

*“And Jesus answered them, saying, The **hour** is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.... Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this **hour**: but for this cause came I unto this **hour**.”⁷*

*“Behold, the **hour** cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”⁸*

And with the cross His **hour** speaks of His resurrection and glorification:

*“These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the **hour** is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.”⁹*

Here is how Archbishop Sheen put it:

“The ‘Hour,’ therefore, referred to His glorification through His Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension.... His mother was asking for a miracle; He was implying that a miracle worked as a sign of His Divinity would be the beginning of His Death. The moment He showed Himself before men as the Son of God, He would draw down upon Himself their hatred, for evil can tolerate mediocrity, but not supreme goodness. The miracle she was asking for would be unmistakably related to His Redemption.”¹⁰

Mary knew full well the prediction that Simeon had made to her years before, as recorded in the Gospel of Luke: “A sword shall pierce thine own soul also.” The pain of the Cross awaited her too, for her ordeal was to watch her Son die in shame and agony while His enemies rejoiced and delighted in His sufferings as entertainment, amusement and a kind of victory. Knowing that He was going to begin to take the path that would lead to the Cross, she speaks her last line that was recorded in Scripture: “Whatsoever he saith [SETH] unto you, do it.”

Here we see the same willingness on her part that was expressed years earlier at the Annunciation: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it unto me according to thy word.” As Archbishop Sheen wrote:

“He was telling His mother that she was virtually pronouncing a sentence of death over Him. Few are the mothers who send their sons to battlefields; but here was one who was actually hastening the hour of her son’s mortal conflict with the forces of evil.”¹¹

Here we see, as well, how the Lord took up the work of His Cross willingly. Years later, in the garden of Gethsemane, the most significant words that he spoke to the Father were, “nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done.”