

## Readings for the Second Sunday after Epiphany

19<sup>th</sup> January 2025

### First Reading: Isaiah 62:1-5

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,  
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,  
until her vindication shines out like the dawn,  
and her salvation like a burning torch.  
The nations shall see your vindication,  
and all the kings your glory;  
and you shall be called by a new name  
that the mouth of the LORD will give.  
You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,  
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.  
You shall no more be termed Forsaken,  
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate;  
but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her,  
and your land Married;  
for the LORD delights in you,  
and your land shall be married.  
For as a young man marries a young woman,  
so shall your builder marry you,  
and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,  
so shall your God rejoice over you.

### Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

### Gospel: St John 2:1-11

There was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

#### **A Reflection for the Second Sunday after Epiphany**

As I came to prepare this reflection, it had just been announced that a ceasefire had been agreed between Israel and Hamas. There was celebration amongst both Palestinians and Israelis, even though they were still arguing about the details and who had reneged on what, and people were still continuing to be killed. This three-stage deal, which we all recognise as extremely fragile, has a long, long way to go, and there's much more to be achieved beyond it to address the deeper, underlying causes of the tensions, disagreements and war in the Middle East. But it is a first step, one in which we rejoice but perhaps anxiously, as we continue to pray that the ceasefire will hold, and negotiations continue to progress.

Was the agreement the product of war weariness, or of painstaking negotiations behind the scenes over many months, or a response to Trump's threat that all hell would break loose if an agreement wasn't reached by Monday, or other factors? Maybe there was something of all of them, and maybe amongst it all, there was a recognition that war doesn't solve any problem in the long term. We'll never know. I'm not naïve enough, I hope, to believe that everything will now go smoothly and everyone will live happily ever after. But there is no doubt that this first step will transform the lives of the people of Gaza for the better, if only because they are no longer being bombed into oblivion. It will transform the lives of the Israeli hostages and their families as they are re-united or enabled to bury their loved ones with decency and respect. It is the beginning of a process that, God willing, will allow ongoing transformation to take place, and we need to keep on praying for the Middle East, that this first step will lead to many more.

As I have said before, in this Epiphany season, our Gospel readings week by week tell us of revelations of Jesus' identity and what he in turn revealed to us about the nature of God. There are many ideas that we could take from today's account of Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana. One of them is Jesus' power to transform for the better.

As we are told at the end of the Gospel passage, this is the first of the 'signs' that revealed Jesus' glory, the seven signs being one of the characteristics of John's Gospel. The wine provided by the host was running out; Jesus told the servants to fill some large jars with water and, when it was tasted, it had miraculously become wine. But it was not any old wine, it was the best wine; and it appeared just when it looked like the party was coming to an abrupt, and perhaps early, end, something that would have brought shame on the host.

This is a sign on multiple levels. It's a sign of God's kingdom, of the renewal and abundance that the Kingdom brings, not just at the end of time, but now too, often when we least expect it, and perhaps at the point where we think that the wine in our lives has finally run out. It's a sign of Jesus' power to bring about miraculous transformation even in what seem to us the most unpromising of circumstances. And it's a sign of hope; a sign that with God there is more to come and that the best is yet to come.

That this revelation of God's kingdom, of Jesus' transforming power, and of hope took place at a wedding is also a reminder of the closeness of the relationship that God desires there should be between God and humanity. It should be as close as in a marriage, one of the closest of all human relationships. The passage from Isaiah uses the same imagery. God's desire is that we should be a crown of beauty, and a royal diadem in God's hand. Isaiah reminds us that God delights and rejoices in us.

This close relationship with God is something that should transform us. It's a relationship in which we need to have an expectation of encounter and change.

How do we think about the ways in which we encounter God? Perhaps we think that is something that will happen after we die, at the end of time, when we meet God face to face? If we are happy and content in our lives, it can be tempting to think like that. We're comfortable with how things are and, if we're honest, we may not really want God to break in and change things. However, there are also those times in our lives when we would very much like God to step in and transform the circumstances in which we find ourselves, just as we hope and pray for transformation in the Middle East, and elsewhere in the world, just now.

And, of course, it's right that we should pray when circumstances are difficult, and we should pray for the needs of the world, but that's not all there is to this process of transformation. I said that the closeness of our relationship with God is something that should transform us. Comfort is not what we are called to. Not that God wants us to be uncomfortable, or to deny us happiness, as he showed – remember that the water became wine, and the wine was the best wine. But God wants to transform us for the better, to draw us closer to God and enable us to be the best version of ourselves that we can be, the person that God created and calls us to be.

And then God also calls us to transform the world using the gifts he has given us. This is what Paul is writing about in the passage we heard from his first letter to the Corinthians. As he says, he doesn't want us to be uninformed, so he reminds us that there are varieties of gifts, services and activities but all are from God, enabled by the Holy Spirit, and all are for the common good, for the building up of God's kingdom in the here and now. No-one gets all the gifts – no-one is super-human, but we all get some gifts. And everyone is needed; no person or gift is superior to the others. Together, all the gifts enable a community to flourish and to serve God. It is a reminder full of hope that, if we all use our God-given gifts, together we can transform the world.

Ultimately, we will live a transformed life in the presence of God, free from the trials and tribulations of earthly life. That time is not yet and, meanwhile, we are called to live today in the light of God's promises, in the light of God's hope, allowing God to transform our lives and using our gifts for the good of all, recognising that God always has more and better for us.

God has more and better for the people of the Middle East too, and our support, in prayer, in encouraging our politicians to actively work for peace, and in material relief, will continue to be needed as they reach forward to a brighter future. May the ceasefire that starts today be a first step in that process of transformation.