

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR C

Second Reading 1 Corinthians 12: 4–11

Corinth was a bustling, wealthy centre of industry and shipbuilding, also famous for its architecture and the Arts.

Its cosmopolitan population came from all parts of the Roman Empire. It was also a noted centre for sport, hosting the Isthmian games every other year. Even in a world very tolerant of sexual excess, Corinth had a reputation for debauchery. 'Living like a Corinthian' was a euphemism for living a dissolute life.

In his First Letter to the Corinthians, St Paul gives us a vivid picture of a first-century city. Indeed, the contemporary Christian will see many

parallels between Corinth and any large town they know.

In this section of the Letter, Paul answers messages he has received from the Corinthians concerning strife and disharmony among the members of the local church. Here he particularly addresses the matter of spiritual gifts.

It seems that people had been bringing many gifts to the Church and that there had been a

discussion over which ones were the most important.

Paul's definition of a gift is wider than our present one. For him, gifts are all the graces bestowed by the Spirit on a given individual which can be used for the benefit of the Church: from practical gifts like administration and helping the poor, to miracles or speaking in tongues.



Gospel John 2: 1–11

St John's Gospel speaks of 'signs' rather than miracles, and he chooses to mention seven of them. This episode of the wedding at Cana is the first. The signs differ from miracles, and what is important for the reader is not the miracle in itself, but what, as a 'sign', it points to. The signs show Jesus's character with increasing clarity as we progress through them.

There was a wedding

The choice of this particular feast is significant, for in the Old Testament, weddings are seen as a symbol of the fulfilment of God's purpose for his people (Hosea 2: 21 and Isaiah 54: 4–6).

Cana in Galilee

Scholars cannot agree as to the exact location of this little village, mentioned only in St John's Gospel. It is generally thought to be about 8 miles NW of Nazareth.

The mother of Jesus

This is the first time Mary appears in St John's Gospel, and throughout she is never mentioned by name. The way she behaves here has led scholars to speculate that she had some position of authority in the festivities and that the wedding was perhaps that of a close relative.

When they ran out of wine

First-century wedding feasts tended to last for seven days and it was customary for the guests to supply wine as part of their gift. Running out of wine would indicate either that the family has very few friends, or that the guests had not brought wine in sufficient quantity, which would be shameful.

Wine was the normal beverage at meal times especially during festivals. It is often seen as a symbol of joy, although drunkenness was disapproved of.

'Woman, why do you turn to me?'

The term 'woman' is not disrespectful. It was commonly employed, and might be compared to our use of 'Madam'. However, it was not the normal way for a son to address his mother. It was unusual for a woman to address a man in public as Mary does here, and Jesus responds with deference.

'My hour has not come yet'

The term 'hour', used nine times in John's Gospel, refers to Jesus's crucifixion, death and resurrection.

'Fill the jars with water'

These large stone jars were normally filled with water used for the traditional Jewish purification before and after meals. They are symbolic of the way Jesus replaces old Jewish traditions with better new ones.