

## Commentary on John 2:1-11 by Marie Balmory

*The Wedding at Cana (Les noces de Cana),*  
in Ce lieu en nous que nous ne connaissons pas - À la recherche du Royaume, p. 17-24  
(Detailed summary)

### v. 5

In the French version of the Catholic Church's text of the wedding at Cana, the words of Jesus' mother are translated as follows: "His mother said to those who were serving, 'Do *all* he tells you.'" (Jn 2:5). The word "all" has been added, as it does not appear in the Greek text. Curiously, this addition exists mainly in translations from Latin countries (Italy, Spain, France), and is absent from other translations (English, German) and in the Latin Vulgate.

Why is it important to point out this error? Here is what theologian Joël Molinaro, who has studied sexual abuse in the Church, writes: "The figure of the Virgin Mary is often used. For abusers, she embodies slavish obedience to God's will; she is the one who always says yes. Predators transform her into a figure demanding submission ('All that he tells you, do it,' Jn 2:5), which is very different from freely consented obedience".

What does the Greek text say? : *ho ti an lege hymin* (literally: the what perchance he may say to you), which can be translated as: whatever he may say to you, or even: whatever he could say to you. It is therefore a mistake to translate it as "*all* he tells you," which is an invitation to total obedience, which does not reflect the figure of Mary.

We need only consider Luke's account of Mary's encounter with the archangel Gabriel. When Gabriel announces that she will give birth to a son whom she will name Jesus, what is her response? Note that she does not immediately utter her famous *fiat* (let it be done to me according to your word). On the contrary, she raises an issue: "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" This forces the angel to change his words: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you..." Thus, Mary did not begin by saying yes; she questioned and opposed the impossible.

### v. 7-9

Let us now turn to what we call a "miracle," but which the evangelist calls a "sign."

Jesus said to those who were serving, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They brought it to him. And he tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not know where the wine came from, but those who served it knew, for they had drawn the water. Then the master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first..."

When we read carefully, we do not see a magical transformation of water into wine. The "sign" mentioned by the evangelist first passes through the faith of the servers. Indeed, they must have had tremendous trust in Jesus to dare to bring what the servers *knew to be water*. We must admit that Jesus had a way of relating to people that could inspire them to do crazy things, such as the crazy action of agreeing to bring water to the master of the feast. It should be noted that this water only becomes wine when it is *brought to another*, in this case the master of the feast and then the groom. It is the water given with trust that becomes wine, not the water stored in the jars: the wine appears in the water brought to others, the water that has entered into the relationship, carrying the desire for wine. It is the wine of trust.

### v. 11

This was the beginning of the signs that Jesus performed.

What sign or "miracle" are we talking about? When we look at the "miracles" of Jesus or those he did not want to perform, we see a constant: they all have relationships as their basis. Take, for example, Jesus' temptations in the desert. Satan asks Jesus to perform three miracles that would allow him to escape hunger and death and possess the world: "If you are the Son of God," prove it by doing what will put you above all others, the son of a god who would rule the laws of the world for you alone. It is the proposal of a selfish miracle, only for himself.

It is the same refusal that we see in Jesus on the cross: "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." It is the temptation of a miracle only for himself, without the other and against the other. Against those who judged and condemned him, against those who sneered. He refuses. He refuses to be the only son of an omnipotent god in whom men would then believe to their doom.

Jesus presents himself: he is strong within, fully accepting the glory of divine sonship, and his ambition is to serve his people and humanity by showing them the way to attain this divine sonship. But sonship is not mastery; it cannot be defended with weapons. It cannot be proven as an objective truth.

This raises the question: does Jesus save sinful humanity to please a god who demands sacrifice, or does he save us from an all-powerful god who would save himself alone and who would be our own downfall? Fortunately for us, by remaining mortal, by staying on our side, he continues to thwart Satan's trap to the very end, bearing witness against the idol, the prince of this world. He keeps us in the presence of the God of the living, "Our Father" to all, who alone can raise his sons from the dead.

Translated from French by André Gilbert, November 2025