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The Encounter Jn 2:1-11



The focus of our reflection here is the Encounter with Jesus as the climax of our Christian life journey (the 5th step). There are two powerful, related images in the wedding at Cana that are meaningful to our understanding of the encounter: wedding and meal/celebration.

This story in John is parallel to the story of the Magi in Matthew (2:1-10). This is the Epiphany. Jesus self revelation to the world takes place in the context of a wedding. There are several passages and images, both in the Scriptural tradition and later spiritual Christian traditions, that refer to the encounter between God/Jesus and humans in terms of marriage. In the story of the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1-4), the place of the encounter was a well. In traditional societies, the well is a very significant setting for an encounter, especially between a young man and a young girl (Gen 4:10-67; Gen 29:1-17; Ex 2:15-21).

This theme is already present very powerfully in the Hebrew Scriptures. In Ezekiel 16 there is a compelling, if not an embarrassing, image of God who cares for me in my utter helplessness. And chooses to love me passionately:

I made you grow like the grass of the fields. You developed, you grew, you reached marriageable age. Your breasts became firm and your hair grew richly, but you were stark naked. Then I saw you as I was passing. Your time had come, the time for love. I spread my cloak over you and covered your nakedness; I gave you my oath, I made a covenant with you -- declares the Lord Yahweh -- and you became mine (vv.7-8).

In Hosea it is even more surprising. "When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry, for the land commits great harlotry by forsaking the Lord" (Hosea 1:2, RSV). God as a passionate lover not only loves me as a faithful lover, but will even come in search of me when I have been unfaithful to Him. The opening sentence of the Song of Songs is direct too: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love-making is sweeter than wine."

The mystical marriage is also common in the spiritual tradition. St Catherine of Alexandria (may be a legendary saint) and Saint Catherine of Sienna (1347-1380) seems to have had visions that describe mystical marriage with Christ. The same was true of St Rose of Lima (d.1617). Mystical marriage is a repeated theme in the writings of Teresa of Avila.

It is important to note that the epiphany of Jesus in John takes place in the context of a meal and a celebration. There is plenty of wine – of best quality and over 500 litres of it. The symbol that I have chosen for this stage is mountain. The encounter with Jesus, the climax of our Christian life journey, results in abundance: fulfilment and satisfaction in life. This happiness is not absence of suffering – that would be dehumanising; but it is the depth of meaning that we enjoy in being human.