

SERMON KRIJTBURG SATURDAY, JANUARY 15TH 2022

on Isaiah, 62, 1 – 5 and John 2, 1-12.

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There was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, my dear friends. That is the beginning of today's gospel: There was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. My first reaction would be: Oh, great, whose wedding is it? Who is the bride, who the groom? Do I know them? But the gospel does not answer that question. Every godfearing Israelite would know the answer. Holy Bible again and again likens the marriage bond to the relationship between God and his people, to the love between God and his chosen ones. Israel is the bride and God the bridegroom, eager to wed his bride. The prophet Isaiah for instance uses the image of a wedding in today's first reading: "Like a young man, marrying his girl, so will the one who built you wed you. And as the bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so will your God rejoice in you."

But at the wedding in Cana something is not running smoothly. Mary feels it, notices it and remarks on it to Jesus, who, with his disciples, is among the guests. "They have no wine!" she says. Do you understand what she is saying? She says that in the marriage between Israel and its God there is no wine, no joy, no warmth, no love. Try to realize what these four words: "They have no wine!" really entail. They mean that the relationship between God and his people has run out of love. Just imagine.... that is a disaster! Mary turns to Jesus. She has experienced how strong the relationship is between Jesus and God, his heavenly Father. She knows how the love between God and their family sustained them and inspired them. Jesus, don't you notice? This is terrible. I can feel it. They have no wine, no life, no love. And when Jesus points towards his hour that will come, Mary says to the servants: "Do whatever He tells you!"

Our gospel story tells us that Jesus brought to the marriage between God and his people a godly measure of the finest wine. A messianic abundance of real life, of inspiration and joy: the messianic abundance of God's love. He offered Himself. He, God's Word, given to his people, the best wine kept for that day!

Our gospel does not tell us how this gift was received. It only tells us that this was the first sign of Jesus' mission to bring new life, new love from God to his chosen ones. We know now that the sign was not understood. That Jesus was not believed to be the promised Messiah. He was rejected and eventually crucified by the leaders of his people. They just liked the wine, but they did not believe the one who offered it. They were like the headwaiter at the wedding feast. He understood that this was the best wine, but he did not know where it came from. The servants, the ordinary people, they knew where it came from and followed Jesus in great crowds wherever He went. The Pharisees and the high priests were skeptical and stayed aloof.

Today, my dear friends, we came together to once more celebrate the wedding feast of our God with us, his chosen people. And again Jesus is in our midst. And I am sure that Mary, his and our mother, is with Him while we celebrate the Eucharistic meal. And I wonder what Mary feels today as she experiences our union with her Son and with each other. Does she sense that we not only accepted Jesus as Emanuel, God with us, but that we really welcomed Him into our life? We remembered his birth only a couple of weeks ago. Has his birth been like a lifegiving wine, renewing our love for Him and His Father? Will Mary find us to be a

vibrant Christian Community where we, in these strange and complected times of lockdowns and restrictions, look after each other and care for those who suffer most? Or will she once more turn to her Son, worrying: "They have no wine!"?

We all have to answer this question for ourselves.

But I notice two developments in the heart of our church and of Christianity as a whole, that feel like new wine, new life for our church.

First of all there is the challenging and brave initiative of pope Francis, who calls us into a synodal process, aimed at renewing the church, turning it into a Synodal Church. A Synod is a gathering where participants are expected to listen to each other. The pope wants us to become a listening church, where people are not asked to pray, pay and shut up! But where all the baptized, whatever their role, be it pope, bishop or church-volunteer is listened to. Where we all together try to find the right way to live the gospel recognizably in the world of our time. Please, my friends, get on to the internet and search for the synodal process in the Roman Catholic Church. Become part of it in whatever way you are able to contribute. That is where we can taste the Messianic wine.

Secondly: Today Christians of all denominations start once more the international week of prayer for unity among the Christian churches. At the last supper Jesus prayed that his followers may be one, just as He, Jesus, is one with his Father. Over the centuries we have lost this unity and developed enmity between different creeds. We fought and killed each other, blaming and accusing. But finally, just about a century ago, some Christians said: Enough is enough. Let us pray together to regain our unity, because those who pray together will not so easily fight each other. And our prayers are being heard. We noticed more and more that on all sides we are people of good will. We have far more in common that what divides us. We have grown to respect the truth that is cherished in all our traditions.

So let us come together and join all our fellow-christians in praying for the good wine of unity. In every Mass in our church a bidding prayer will be sent up to heaven this week, but let all of us join in. Include this prayer into your morning- or evening prayer, or when praying before starting your meal. That all christens may grow in unity. That we may really taste and offer to our world the best wine God is offering to all who turn to Him for help,
Amen.