

Mother of God Community
Sunday Night Praise & Worship
March 3, 2019
Jesus, the Bridegroom
Nancy McCambridge

*Talk taken from **Jesus, the Bridegroom, The Greatest Love Story Ever Told**, by Dr. Brant Pitre.*

Proverbs 29:18

“Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keeps the law, happy is he.” I know I constantly need to be reminded of the bigger picture instead of focusing on our problems. In view of what is happening in the Church today with all the ambiguity and confusion, it is good to remind ourselves of the truth and beauty of our Catholic faith and God’s divine love for his bride, the Church.

The passage that keeps me focused and remembering what we are trying to build here at MOG and is for the wider church is from Isaiah 62:1-5. This is how God views His Church:

“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. ²The 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. ³You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. ⁴You shall no more be called Forsaken, and your land Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight and your land Espoused; for the LORD delights in you, and makes your land his spouse. ⁵For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over His bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.” Isaiah 62:1-5

I was interested in this book because I wanted to come to a deeper understanding of what it means to experience the love of the Bridegroom and for my mind to be expanded and broadened to see the bigger picture.

All of salvation history is the divine love story between Creator and creature, between God and Israel, a story that comes to its climax on the bloody wood of a Roman cross.

THE BRIDEGROOM GOD OF ISRAEL

You are familiar with the story of Moses, the exodus from Egypt, and the journey to Mount Sinai. Moses rises up, and through a series of wonders and plagues, frees the twelve tribes of Israel from slavery in Egypt under an oppressive Pharaoh (Exodus 1-3) Then the Lord of Creation appears atop the mountain in fire and smoke and gives the people of Israel the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) It is at this point that he enters into a special relationship with them known as a “covenant” which is a sacred family bond between persons, establishing between them a permanent and sacred relationship. They are now in a flesh and blood relationship.

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When we open the pages of the prophets, you will find something remarkable: they boldly proclaim that behind the history of the covenant at Mount Sinai lies a deeper mystery. From the prophets' point of view, what happened at Sinai was not just a giving of a set of laws, but the spiritual wedding of God to Israel.

"Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your naked body. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine." Ezekiel 16:8

"The word of the Lord came to me, saying 'Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, 'Thus says the Lord. I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruits of his harvest.'" (Jeremiah 2:1-2)

SIN AS SPIRITUAL ADULTERY

From a Jewish perspective, if we look at the God of Israel as the divine Bridegroom, then this changes not only the way we see the Creator, but also the way we see transgressions against God which leads to spiritual adultery. For if the God of Israel is not just a Creator, or a Lawgiver, but the Bridegroom, then sin is not just the breaking of a rule or a law, but the betrayal of a relationship as we see when Israel begins to offer sacrifices to the golden calf. Exodus 32:1-2, 4-6.

"Can a maiden forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number ..."

"Surely, as a faithless wife leaves her husband, so have you been faithless to me, O house of Israel.' says the Lord" Jeremiah 2:32; 3:20

God, however, does not give up on his bride, but promises to one day forgive her sins by establishing a new marriage covenant with her. In the books of the prophets, one of the most prominent images of the future age of salvation is this image of marital reconciliation between God and his faithless bride. Over and over again, the prophets speak of a future marriage covenant between God and his estranged wife: Isaiah 54:5-8, 10; Jeremiah 31:31-32, 34; Ezekiel 16:60, 62-63

"And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. And in that day, says the Lord, you will call me, 'My husband', and no longer will you call me, 'My Baal'....And I will make for you a covenant on that dayAnd I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord." Hosea 2:15-20

(Personal sharing about Hosea reading)

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God showers his wife with the bridal gifts of steadfast love, compassion and faithfulness. God promises that one day he will forgive all that she has done. In the past, she has treated the pagan gods as her lord; in the future she will call the God of Israel her husband. Salvation is not just about the forgiveness of sins. From a biblical perspective, salvation is ultimately about union with God. The God of Israel is not a distant deity or an impersonal power, but the Bridegroom who wants his bride to know him intimately, to share in His divine nature in a spiritual marriage that is not only faithful and fruitful, but everlasting (II Peter 1:3)

JESUS, THE BRIDEGROOM

In the N.T. when John the Baptist comes on the scene he did not usher in the kingdom of God by describing Jesus as a king, warrior or a priest but a bridegroom. John and Jesus were Jewish and they of course were familiar with the Jewish scriptures which point to the Messianic promises. According to the Jewish traditions, it was the job of the “best man” in an ancient Jewish wedding to bring the bride to the bridegroom when the time for the wedding came.

“You yourself bear me witness that I said, I am not the Messiah, but I am the one who has been sent before him. He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices with joy because of the voice of the bridegroom. Therefore this joy of mind is now fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.” John 3:28-30

When Jesus began his public ministry he could have started it in many ways. If he wanted people to look at him as a teacher he could have started with the Sermon on the Mount. If he had wanted to emphasize his power over demons, then he would have performed an exorcism in the sight of all such as casting out the legion of evil spirits living within the Gerasene demoniac. If Jesus had wanted more than anything else to reveal his power over death, the obvious way to begin his ministry would have been to bring someone back from the dead.

WEDDING AT CANA

According to the Gospel of John, the first public miracle Jesus performed, which set the stage for the rest of his ministry was to transform water into wine at a Jewish wedding. In an ancient Jewish context, it was customary for a wedding celebration to last not one day, not two days but an entire week – seven days of feasting and joyful celebration. Mary, who is an attentive mother, brings the situation to Jesus’ attention. By performing a miracle in which he provides miraculous wine, Jesus is beginning to reveal his identity as the long-awaited Jewish Messiah.

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“On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all people a feast of fat things, a feast of fine wine, of fat things full of marrow, of fine wine well refined. And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the covering that is cast over all nations, He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth.” Isaiah 25:6-8

This is the description of the Messianic banquet. It will be a sacrificial banquet of wine. In the Jewish Temple, both the fat of the sacrifices and fine wine were offered to God as bloody and unbloody sacrifices. It will be a universal banquet for both Israel and Gentiles. And it will be a banquet that will undo the effects of the Fall of Adam and Eve, for by means of God’s banquet, death itself will be swallowed up and the sins of all the redeemed will be taken away.

When Jesus’ miracle interpreted in the light of ancient Jewish expectations of the superabundant wine of God’s banquet, and ancient Jewish hopes for the future, we can see that in providing hundreds of gallons of wine for this small country wedding at Cana, Jesus is signaling to those who have the eyes to see that the ancient Jewish hope for the superabundant wine of the age of salvation is beginning to be fulfilled in himself.

THE LAST SUPPER

When we come to the Last Supper and the passion of Jesus, everything changes. The hour has finally come for Jesus to give the supernatural wine of the banquet of God. However, instead of changing water into wedding wine, Jesus now changes the wine into the blood – the blood of the new and everlasting marriage covenant. Jesus, the bridegroom, gives his bride the greatest wedding gift he could possible give: the gift of Himself. This act of sacrificial love that begins in the Upper Room and is consummated on the wood of the cross is the wine of Jesus’ own blood. This wine is the supernatural wine that will enable those who drink it to swallow up death forever. And this wine is the wine through which God will not only take away the sins of his people, but also unite them to Himself forever, by making them sharers in the flesh and blood of Jesus. The Eucharist is both a participation in heavenly glory and an anticipation of the eternal marriage banquet that will be fulfilled at the end of time.

And as blood and water flowed from the pierced side of Christ, the Bridegroom washes away the sins of the people of God – the bride of Christ – with the living water flowing from his side in the cleansing waters of Baptism and the soul is given the “spirit” that Christ handed over in his dying breath on the cross. (John 7:37-39; 19:30) Baptism is a nuptial mystery of the forgiving love of Jesus because its power to cleanse from sin flows directly from the nuptial mystery of the cross, when Jesus the Bridegroom poured out his

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love for the Church, a love that “covers a multitude of sins”. (1 Peter 4:8) It is also a sacrament of intimate union with Jesus, through which the individual believer becomes part of the Mystical Body of all believers, the Church.

JESUS' CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH

Many people these days are at least somewhat familiar with the ancient Roman form of execution known as crucifixion. For most, this familiarity primarily stems from reading the Gospels or from viewing popular depictions of the crucifixion of Jesus in art and film. On one hand, this kind of familiarity can be very helpful. On the other hand, because the crucifixion of Jesus is so familiar, it can also be easy to forget or to underestimate just how horrific this manner of execution really was. Due to its hideous cruelty and abject humiliation it was not employed against Roman citizens but against slaves. Christ, fully man, endured everything a man could endure, even separation from God. In his solidarity with us, he experienced the God-forsakenness of sin: “Why have you abandoned me?” He was cut off from communion with his Father, so that our flesh and sin, which was punishable by death, could be dealt with and we could enter his life.

Could Jesus have saved us without suffering? Perhaps, but it's Love that gives the cross its value. Love, not nails, bound Jesus to the cross, the love of God poured out through the human heart of Jesus.

Isaiah 52:13-15 gives us a glimpse of what Jesus went through for us:

“See my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him – his appearance was so disfigures beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness – so he will sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.”

“But He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.” Isaiah 53:5

THE WEDDING SUPPER OF THE LAMB

The Bible, however, does not end with the cross. In the New Testament, the story of Jesus and his bride continues after the wedding ceremony. Although the wedding of the Messiah and his bride has begun, it is not yet fully complete. Jesus is preparing a place for his bride. All of human history is headed toward the

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wedding supper of the Lamb and the unveiling of the bride of Christ. Revelation describes the coming of the kingdom at the end of time as follows:

“Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready.” Revelation 19:6-7

“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”
Revelation 21:1

Revelation describes the end of the age as the eternal marriage of the Messiah and “the Bride, the wife of the Lamb,” the new Jerusalem.

When Bernadette, our daughter, was recuperating from a very serious cancer-related surgery at 3-1/2 years old, we had brought her home from the hospital and I had the job of cleaning her broviac catheter which had to be cleaned twice a day. Julia was 4 months old at the time and Monica, Bernadette’s twin sister, was beside herself wondering what had happened to her best friend. It was a time of severe stress in our family. But we had this children’s music tape of a little girl who had a dream that she died and went to heaven and how she was rejoicing with the angels and saints and worshipping the Lamb who was on the throne. One of the lines was *“Alleluia, Alleluia, for the wedding of the Lamb has come and the banquet has begun. Jesus has won the victory, He has conquered death for us. Jesus has won the victory, He has conquered through the cross.”* I would play that tape over and over while caring for Bernadette and experienced such joy and peace in the midst of the storm, and I felt I was not alone but all of heaven was rejoicing with me. This is the power of the word.

