

HOMILY – PARISH FAMILY, COMMUNITY OF WITNESSES & CHILDREN OF GOD - 17 JANUARY 2016

What does it mean to be part of God's family? What does it mean to be a parish family?
What does it have to do with celebration and birth?

After the homily today, I'll ask our parents to explain to their children how we are CHILDREN of GOD.

Then after that, we will pray our first petition, asking God to help us live out our vocation as children of God, as parish family and community.

We have already heard in Chapter 1 of John's Gospel

- * that John was 'a witness to testify to the light' (1/7).
- * about Jesus that 'his own people did not accept him' (1/11).
- * the promise that 'to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God' (1/12) 'born of God'.
- * the stories of how John the Baptist, Andrew, an unnamed disciple, Simon Peter, Philip and Nathanael came to believe in Jesus, and how one person invites another person to come and see.
- * we hear of the invitation to come and see, and to follow. Even though some had not accepted him, already the family, the community of Jesus is growing,

So we know we are called to BELIEVE in Jesus, to FOLLOW Jesus, to BE CHILDREN of God, to WITNESS to the light of Jesus, to be BORN of God, to INVITE others to come and see.

Now we come to today's Gospel in Chapter 2 at the WEDDING FEAST of Cana, where Jesus is a guest.

People in the ancient Middle East were familiar with their wedding traditions.

Social historians tell us that after the Procession of the bride from the parents' house to the home of the bridegroom or his parents, family friends stay outside, and the bride's veil is lifted inside the house.

The Gospels lift the veil from our eyes as we begin to see what being a follower of the saving love and mercy of Jesus entails.

Father Gerry asks who has ever been best man or best woman at a wedding. Then he returns to the reflection on the Gospel.

The best man had an important role between the groom and bride's family. He is a witness and companion to the groom.

We have already seen John the Baptist as friend and witness and companion to Jesus. It is not the wedding of Jesus, but through the turning of water into wine, the disciples accompanying Jesus are now believers.

Like John the Baptist and the early disciples, each of us come to be a best man or best woman to Jesus, to be a companion and witness.

John's Gospel makes us take notice of the relationship between Jesus, his mother and the disciples of Jesus in this developing family / community of Jesus.

Even the response of Jesus to his mother surprises us and unsettles us. It sets the scene for Chapter 19 at the foot of the cross.

In chapter 19/25-27 we hear that *'standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.*

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son."

Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.'

Through the cross our relationship as family is sealed. We are interconnected. Jesus died and rose from the dead to save us.

We ask ourselves – in the celebration of life – how do we witness to the risen Jesus Christ? Chapters 1 and 3 give reference to birth. With Nicodemus we hear about being born anew. We are continually being converted to Jesus.

We are family, as children of God. Now we reach out in solidarity to our family in the Middle East. We will join them in their ancient tradition of prayer.

As we prepare to enter three days of prayer for peace in the Fast of Nineveh, as family members we pray

Loving God,
Over these days,
Remember those who lived in Mosul and the Nineveh Plains.
In your love for them,
Grant them freedom, peace and mercy.

Bless those who support them in the camps.
Bless those who provide food, water, clothes and security.
Open our hearts to them in their suffering.
Open our hearts to them in prayer.

Hear the cry of the people of the Middle East for peace and healing.
Hear our desire to be in prayerful solidarity with them.
Uplift those in exile and sustain them.
Grant them a safe return home.
Amen.

(We pause)

Now the children ask their parents what it means to be Children of God.

[Fr. Gerry Hefferan – Homily – Parish Family, Community of Witnesses & Children of God –
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