

Epiphany 02 C 2022
January 16, 2022 :: John 2: 1-11
Fr. Jim Cook

“In the Spirit. In the Moment.”

Apropos of today’s gospel reading: Several years ago, my brother sent me a very special birthday card. On the cover is a picture of a police officer issuing a traffic ticket to a priest. The officer asks the priest: “Reverend, have you been drinking?” The priest responds: “Just water, officer.” “Just water? Then why do I smell wine?” the officer asks. To which the priest exclaims: “Good Lord! He’s done it again!”

I think it’s likely that, every time I hear our gospel reading — in which Jesus turns a lot of water into a lot of great wine, at a friend’s wedding in Cana of Galilee — I find myself thinking: “Wouldn’t it be great if Jesus could be at all of our parties? There would always be plenty of great wine. And probably lots of great food as well!” And I’m fairly certain I’m not alone in that.

But do you know what? I can recall having those thoughts when I was a teenager in college. Probably even earlier. And you would think that by the time someone is my age, they would have let go of those sorts of thoughts, and moved beyond them.

But here I am, at 64 years of age — having been ordained for nearly 33 years, and having professed a faith in Jesus Christ for nearly 50 years — and that's *still* my default response? All of which makes me wonder if my faith and vocation have been based on the hope and expectation that God is going to handle the catering?

I'll make another confession: Several years ago, I purchased a Powerball ticket. The payoff was absolutely huge, and I gave in to temptation. Later, when I was sure no one was looking, I made the sign of the cross over it — a really *serious* sign of the cross — and I invoked all of the powers and benefits, designated for someone in my vocation, over that ticket. Obviously that didn't work, because I'm still here. But isn't that just another version of my hoping and expecting God to handle the catering?

And I know I'm not alone in this. I see a lot of people, looking for God to intervene in their lives, in big and dramatic ways. They're looking for the mountaintop experience. They're looking for the dramatic healing. They're looking, in other words, for God to get busy in their lives ... *in the big things*. But mainly in the things that *they* think are important. And while they're doing that, they miss seeing God at work in their lives in the ordinary things.

In their book entitled *Spiritual Literacy: Reading the Sacred in Everyday Life*, Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat, talk about how we can *learn* to see the sacred and the spiritual in the most common of things and experiences. And they began their book thus:

“Life is a spiritual adventure. Every day we encounter signs that point to the active presence of [the] Spirit in the world around us. Spiritual literacy is the ability to read the signs written in the texts of our own experiences.”

And then, the Brussats provided a list of examples of experiences in which the participants encountered the presence of the Spirit. Here are a few of them. Listen and see if any of them sound like something you might have done, or could do.

“A group of women gets together once a month to take turns answering one question. They share their deepest concerns and the stories of their lives.

“A retired couple comes to the beach every day with their dogs. They carry garbage bags and pick up litter as they walk. They love the beach and make a habit of caring for it.

“A woman teaches in the Sunday school, and serves as an officer of the women’s group at her church. Through her daily demonstrations of enthusiasm for church work, she inspires others to become involved.

“A young couple has just had their first child and decides to return to the synagogue. They want their boy to relish his ethnic roots and to experience the practice of Judaism.

“A group of therapists gathers on a weekday afternoon to talk about their night dreams, and to do mental imagery exercises as a way of getting in touch with their inner lives.

“A woman in a stressed-filled job attends yoga class every other day. This combination of bodywork and meditation relaxes and revitalizes her.

And finally,

“A small circle of people meets each month to talk about the story of a movie in relation to the stories of their own lives; they call the process they are going through “soul making.”

I think these examples make it pretty clear that even the most ordinary and everyday of activities and experiences can be full of spiritual insight and meaning, *if we take the time to look for it.*

One day, several years ago — and just because we thought it would be fun — my family and I hopped into our car and drove to an artist’s supply shop. And there we purchased a fifty-pound box of sculptors’ clay, and a few simple sculpting tools. We probably spent no more than \$30.

When we returned home, we opened the box of clay, and distributed a large chunk to each of the four of us. Laura, Emily and I sat at the kitchen table, and Peggy took a tray-table into the living room. We put on some music, and as each of us worked at our chunks of clay, we talked about different things.

At first, I found that I was anxious about how my piece of sculpture would turn out — I had been *trying* to fashion it into the shape of a dog's head — but I made myself focus on the *process* of working the clay, and on how good it felt to mold and shape it.

At some point, something really remarkable happened. I looked up from my lump of clay, I looked at my daughters, across the table from me; and then at my wife, clearly visible in the next room; and I heard the music we were playing; and I felt the damp clay in my hands; and at that moment ... I felt full. Full of the Spirit. Full of joy. Full of peace. It was a small moment, and it passed quickly as I returned my attention to the clay in front of me. But it was real!

But in that moment, because I was able to focus on that moment, it became clear that God was near, that God wanted me

to have joy in life, and that — setting aside for a little while, all the worries and cares of my life — renewal and refreshment were possible ... even in the moments.

In the end, I think that it's fine to hope for the big things in life from God. It's fine to hope for relief when we are burdened. It's fine to hope for wealth when we're poor. It's fine to hope for health when we're sick. It's fine to hold out hope for God to intervene in our lives in big ways — like Jesus did at that wedding in Cana of Galilee.

However, as we await those big interventions, *may we not forget* that, in the midst of our burdens, in the midst of our poverty, and in the midst of our sickness, God still comes to us in the small things, even in the fleeting moments of our lives. And in those moments, small though they may be, and as brief as they may be, the Spirit of God is there, waiting for us to notice him and recognize him, and to receive from him, refreshment, and renewal, and strength.

Amen.