

That We Might Believe.

Text: John 2. 1-11 (The Wedding at Cana)

There are a couple of things that, to the best of my knowledge, Radley does better than any other school: parties and wine.

Our parties are the best: the food is delicious, the setting magnificent and fireworks spectacular. Our wine cellar stocks some of the finest Clarets, Ports and Sauternes available. The Grape Vine Society maintains a tradition of Radleians leaving this place with educated noses and discerning palates. Indeed, fine wines are considered so important that Mr Aird was invited back last term to give a lecture to VI.2 on *Wine-Tasting*, and Mr Bartlett will be giving a talk tomorrow to the Science Society on the *Chemistry of Wine*.

It is no wonder that a miracle of turning water into wine might excite our imagination, or even fantasy!

But why is the account of Jesus's first miracle appointed for this time of year? Surely it is Epiphany ; we have been singing hymns about the Wise Men, the Magi, those Three Kings of Orient, that were. We are celebrating the Revelation of Jesus to the Gentiles.

God revealed himself to mankind only very gradually over many generations. As human civilisation evolved, so God revealed more and more about himself, and about what he expected of Man.

Like a child growing up, this process occurred in steps, the next one only being taken when ready. The truth was revealed through the prophets and events of each epoch, but we were so unteachable that he had to repeat particular lessons over and over again: how many times did he have to demonstrate his power by overthrowing Israel's enemies against unsurmountable odds?

You can trace the many ways God used to reveal himself in the pages of the Old Testament. But when all was ready, he finally, and definitively, revealed himself in the person of Jesus. It is in Christ that our understanding of God's nature is brought to its culmination. He is indeed the best wine that has been left till last.

The Gospels recount four important revelation events that are celebrated by the Church in this season:- Jesus's birth at Bethlehem (the Nativity); secondly, his being made manifest to the wise men, the first

Gentiles to acknowledge him as the Messiah (the Epiphany); thirdly, his Baptism by John in the River Jordan, which heralded his public ministry and during which the Father's voice is heard acknowledging his Son; and, fourthly, the changing of water into wine at the Marriage Feast at Cana.

This was his first miracle, and directly because of it his first disciples believed in him. Mary, his mother, had believed from the moment she had conceived, but his followers only had the word of John the Baptist that Jesus was the Messiah. Now any doubts were removed: they believed in him too.

As is often the case with the Gospels, in looking at the beginning, we see the end. "My hour has not yet come," says Jesus. Only we know to which hour he is referring: the moment when his mission of salvation comes to its fruition on the Cross of Calvary.

We also perceive that, in this first sign, the wine has a special significance. His first miracle of providing limitless quantities of fine wine for all the guests at the marriage feast has a resonance with the feeding of the five thousand, the Last Supper, and today's Eucharist.

In the Eucharist, wine is taken and given to us in commemoration of the pouring out of his blood on the Cross. We believe that the Last Supper is made present to us in a real way. In the Eucharistic Prayer you will hear in a moment, we pray that the bread and wine may become for us the body and blood of our Lord. We enter into the Eucharistic sacrifice.

The transformation of the water into wine at Cana thus prefigures the transformation at the Last Supper of the wine into the blood of our Saviour.

God does not show the full depth of his love and care for us by slaying thousands of Ephraimites or Philistines, but through the sacrifice of his own dear Son.

So, what does the Gospel teach us here this morning:

Let Mary's words echo in our ears: **Do whatever he tells you.**

As we come forward to take our Communion, our faith is strengthened, just as it was for those disciples, who drank that miraculous wine at Cana, and **believed in him.**