

## Homily for Christmas Party 2017

The story of the wedding feast at Cana and Mary's role there is familiar to all of us. Her words to the servants when there was not enough wine: "Do whatever He tells you" were our first view of Mary in the Gospels as the strong woman portrayed in our statue here, the Mary we call the Mother of Providence. Her words to Jesus encouraged him to work his first recorded miracle despite his response that His time had not yet come.

Perhaps because it's the beginning of another year, the time when many people make New Year's resolutions, it struck me in meditating on this scene at the wedding feast, that Mary, with the help of Jesus, saved all of us the burden of making resolutions for this new year. They gave us the only resolution we need; "Do whatever He tells you!" That's all we have to do! That sounded great to me until this little skeptical voice in my head said: "that's not specific enough for a New Year's resolution." The Gospels are replete with Jesus' suggestions, as well as his example, of how we're to live. What about the Ten Commandments, the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, what about making God's Providence more visible? How are we to know which one "do whatever He tells you" means? Then I remembered that when the Pharisees asked Jesus what the greatest commandments were, Jesus said: love God with your whole heart and love your neighbor as yourself." These two mandates encompass all the others. It was as though Jesus summarized everything for us. So we only need to make one resolution for the New Year! What a relief!

That seemed, at first, as if one resolution would actually make life easier. One resolution can't be that difficult to keep! But that little disturbing voice inside my head still had a few questions like "Who does Jesus mean by "our neighbor?" I know He answered that question with the story of the Good Samaritan, but it sounded a lot like He was implying then that everyone is our neighbor, especially people in need, like the man who was robbed and thrown in the ditch. Or like the people the poet Rilke describes as "the beggar who averts her face, the homeless person who has given up asking, the diseased one whom we fear to touch, or one who is poor like wishes muttered in a prison cell, without a world to hold them." Are these all truly our neighbors? Rilke is saying so and probably Jesus meant that too. Well, I told myself, that still doesn't sound too difficult; we don't see people like that often, at least not every day! And it's still having to make only one resolution!

But I knew there was more when I heard that picky little voice in my head ask: What about those we do see often, maybe even every day? Are they all our neighbors too? What about those who aren't even physically poor or sick, just irritating, insensitive, or pushy? If they don't seem to have any great need, do we still have to treat them like our neighbors anyway? I knew the answer even before I heard the question in my head. Of course, Jesus actually meant that everyone is our neighbor, everyone without exception, including every person in our religious community, every Sister, every Associate. He's asking and expecting that we never reject any one of them, that we'll offer to help any Sister or Associate when they're in need, that we'll always be willing to forgive no matter how much they hurt us. If everyone is our neighbor and we're to love each one as we love ourselves, this one resolution that I thought would be easy, because it's just one, definitely isn't easy!

Then the voice in my head began to question even more, when do we have to do all this loving? all the time? Just when we're young and energetic or even when we're old and tired? If we haven't started yet, when should we begin to love every neighbor as ourselves and when can we stop? Maybe the poet, Wendell Berry, has the answer Jesus would give. He writes: "Now more than ever you can be generous toward each day that comes, young, to disappear forever, and yet remain unaging in the mind. Every day you have less reason not to give yourself away. Every day you have less reason not to give yourself away."

Most of us could say that none of these thoughts are new. We've heard about the wedding feast at Cana, Mary's request to the waiters and Jesus' response many times through the years.. And we've been trying to "do whatever He tells us," to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves" for an equally long time. But this is a new year – we've never been at this moment in history before!

When the waiters did as Jesus told them, a miracle occurred. If, as a community, we decide today that we'll each make a resolution to begin to love one another, every Sister and Associate, in a renewed way in this New Year, what might be the miracle we will witness? Perhaps we would experience more understanding of our differences, less need to critique or complain, more times of lightness together as we hopefully felt in the auditorium today, more compassion with our own mistakes and more empathy with those of others, a greater motivation to create a community of lovers – of God and one another. Such an atmosphere would surely be considered a miracle! We will recognize it with each breaking of the bread, with each new light in the darkness, with each increased awareness of the visibility of God's Providential love in and around us. May it be so!

