

Working Together(?)

We hear in today's Gospel lesson how Mary, the mother of Jesus, goes to Jesus in the frantic hope that He'll do something—anything—in order to stave off the *intense shame and dishonor* that would inevitably arise when it was discovered that the wedding party (more than likely close family members of Mary) had run out of wine so soon. Understand: Mary wasn't going to Jesus because she wanted God-in-the-flesh to work a divine miracle. No. She was going to her son in a *panic*. *"This is terrible! Do something!"* I'm quite sure you can all relate. We've all gone to loved ones when we've found ourselves in trouble. *"Help! Help me out of this terrible predicament!"*

This is when Jesus speaks very calmly to her, not as her son, per se, but as the Word of God in the flesh. *"Woman, what does this have to do with Me?"* I know I've preached on this in the past, but it still bears repeating. That's **NOT** what Jesus said. *That's a very poor translation of a very difficult Greek phrase.* In the original Greek, Jesus said to His mother, *"What to you and to me?"* Well...that doesn't really flow off the tongue well, does it? *"What to you and to me?"* *That just doesn't work grammatically. It doesn't flow.* It sounds more like a cave man than the Son of Man.

But...it's worth wrestling with this difficult text because there is **GREAT** theology in this question that Christ asks. What Jesus is asking His mother is, *"This is a God-problem, so how does the solution pertain to you and me together? What do you have to do with the remedy to this God-problem? What can you contribute? This is not a problem that can be solved by man. This is a problem that can only be solved by God. You and I—together—have nothing to do with this. This is for Me to handle...not you."* And Mary hears this...*and believes.* That in itself is a miracle. She doesn't balk or bristle up as if her son just disrespected her. Rather, it's at that moment that what she hears from her God and Lord enters her ears and opens her eyes of faith. All that she had stored up and pondered in her heart over the years, beginning with the angelic announcement of the miraculous birth of this now-grown man was now flooding back into her memory. *"Do whatever He tells you."* Mary humbles herself to the Word of God. *She gets it. She believes. She trusts.* She calls others to hear and believe and trust in His almighty Word.

And we all know how the rest of the story plays out. Through some very simple words, *even "odd" commands* to those obedient servants who carried out very simple actions/orders, our Lord *epiphanizes* His almighty power as well as His great compassionate love and concern for His people. We're told that this epiphany miracle revealed the fact that our God and Lord didn't just provide *more*

wine or even *good* wine; rather, He provided an *over-flowing abundance of the very best wine*. Through the speaking of His almighty Word, this very Word of God in the flesh manifests and makes known how all “God issues” are *rightly recognized and fulfilled* in Him and Him alone. “*What to me and to you?*”

Now, before we go any further I do need to make clear that this is **not** a lesson on how Jesus can miraculously fix all your problems, big or small, *provided you just obey and do whatever He tells you to do*. That’s not the point of this Gospel text (or any of Scripture, for that matter). God doesn’t work on a *quid pro quo* basis. It’s not a matter of “you scratch my back, and I’ll scratch yours.” Believe it or not, but this lesson isn’t about you and your problems at all. This lesson is about Jesus and His *omnipotent love and concern and compassion* for you, for me, and for all nations and peoples.

I direct your attention to this crucifix. “*What to you and to Me?*” The wage of sin is death; not just physical death, *but eternal death*. Let that sink in. The wage of just *one single sin* earns you an **eternity** of damnation. That’s a God-sized problem! That’s much bigger than the Packers not making the playoffs. That’s much bigger than Greenwood’s stinky water issue. That’s much bigger than low funds in the bank account or even illness or job loss or family struggles or any other tribulation on this side of creation. Believe it or not, but there are some things that state championships and yoga and New Year’s resolutions can’t fix. There are some things that all the therapy in the world can’t remedy. You can make yourself busy and work your fingers to the bone with all your different projects and good deeds, and in the end **none** of it will give you the peace that you’re longing for. None of it is able to make payment for even one single sin, let alone an eternity’s worth of them. That’s a God-sized problem. If ever there is need for a miracle, this is it, for **ALL** have sinned and fallen short of the glory of the Lord. I know that rubs some people the wrong way, but it’s true. Sin isn’t just what we do; *it’s who we are, by nature*. By virtue of our lineage and descent from Adam, we all deserve nothing but God’s present and eternal punishment.

And yet...the great and undeserved miracle of God’s grace and love breaks through, in spite of our sin...yea, **BECAUSE** of our sin. Here on this cross, veiled in the flesh of the lowliest of men, here is God’s *just and righteous wrath against all sin*, and here—at the same time—is God’s *immeasurable and incomprehensible love* for you. Here, and only here, is where the miracle of God Himself in the flesh paid the wage in full for each and every sin of the world for all time. “*What to me and to you?*” Here, and only here, is where the undeserved miracle of God Himself in the flesh cried out in victory, “*It is finished!*” This is a cry of victory that **only** the all-atoning sacrificial Lamb of God could make, and He made that cry from the sacrificial altar that was His cross...for you. Here, and only here, is where God Himself provided the God-sized remedy to our deadly sinful condition. *Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*

Now...can I make you believe any of this? Can I make you look to these ordinary elements of Word, water, bread, and wine and recognize the almighty Christ in your midst, feeding and nourishing you with His *real and tangible gifts of victory* over sin, death, and the devil? Can I make you see and recognize Christ manifesting His unconditional and unfailing grace, mercy, and peace to you *in and through these gifts?* More specifically, can I make you desire any of this? Can I make you hunger and thirst for this righteousness? *No...that takes a miracle.* That's the miracle of faith, which God Himself continues to work on you, in you, and through you each and every time His Word is rightly taught and His sacraments rightly administered. Folks: Don't overlook or shun these miraculous means! This is how God works!

I say this for good reason. The world we live in is a tough and miserable and dark place, *and it's only getting worse.* Our Lord promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against His holy Church...but He never promised that we won't suffer all along the way. It's hard to look around nowadays and not cry out to God for some sort of miracle. *"Make it all stop!"*

My friends: Here is God's miracle for you. Here is God's peace for you. It's right here; *right where He tells you to look; right where He promises to be, now and to the very end of the age.* Here is the peace of God that surpasses all understanding. Here is the glory of God...for you. Yes, this glory is veiled right now. It's not very impressive. But...the full glory of God, which dwells bodily in Jesus Christ, *is right here, right now.* You're not getting cheated or slighted in any way, shape, or form. The full glory of almighty God comes to you and dwells with you *and will even dwell within you* as His Word enters your ears and pierces your soul; as the Body and Blood of Christ Himself is placed in your mouth for you to inwardly-digest, *all for the purpose of manifesting and making known the Father's great love and mercy and grace that He has for you in Christ and because of Christ.*

Guys: It's that simple. It's that powerful. It's that *beautiful.* For better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness or in health, from now and into all eternity: Here is Immanuel—God with us—for you, for your forgiveness, and for your peace and assurance. *"What to me and to you?"* When recognized through the lens of the cross, it's not that difficult to understand, is it? In fact, it's actually very easy. *The real question is: What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits to me?* **Answer:** I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and I will call upon the name of the Lord.

May this be your reality, now and into all eternity. **AMEN.**