

**SECOND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME
Year C January 20, 2013**

Theme: A Really Big Wedding

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How come you parents don't name your daughters any more with wonderful old biblical names like Hephzibah and Beulah?

Undoubtedly it is because the newer versions of the bible translate these names for us rather than leaving them in their original language.

Had we heard the today's reading of second part of the Prophet Isaiah as did our eighteenth and nineteenth century forbearers in the old King James or Douai-Rheims Translation we would have heard:

**No more shall people call your "Forsaken"
And your land "Desolate";
But you shall be called "Hephzibah"
And your land "Beulah".**

Instead we heard: **But you shall be call "My Delight"
And your land "Espoused".**

The Prophet was actually engaged in weaving an amazing metaphor or image where he compared God and Israel, the people, to a bridegroom and a bride.

He dared to imagine that God would marry the people the way, as he put it, **"a young man marries a young woman....as a bridegroom marries a bride so shall your God rejoice in you."**

This is a stunning statement of God entering into a radically new kind of intimate relationship with humanity: no longer creator to creature, no longer judge to sinner.

Now it is groom to bride, husband to wife, lover to beloved.

Now the relationship of God and humanity is on a whole new level: loving, committed, forever faithful.

It is with this image in the background that we go to Cana and the wedding to which Jesus and his Mother and disciples were also invited.

Interestingly John's Gospel used this story as the introduction to the whole of Jesus' ministry: it is the very first story of that ministry, just after he selects several of his disciples.

With a bit of prompting from his mother, Jesus saves the day at Cana with a huge super abundance of choice, fine wine.

But John's Gospel insists that what Jesus did was not merely to save the day at an obscure little wedding in Cana where we don't even know the names of the bride and groom.

Rather, said the Gospel, **“Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs.”**

Of what was this wedding story and its super abundant supply of choice, fine wine a sign?

Surely it is a sign of Hephzibah and Beulah! My Delight! And my Espoused!

A sign that in Jesus Christ God has come and married himself to his people!

He has espoused himself as groom to his bride, to us, in love and faithfulness forever.

And as bridegrooms and their families have done time in memoriam he has even brought the wine for the reception.

The sign at Cana is just the beginning of the signs that will pour out one over another in John Gospel, signs of love and care and affection for his bride – healing the sick and the paralyzed, giving sight to the blind, feeding the hungry, even raising the dead.

All these signs of love lead up to the greatest sign of all when he lays down his life for us, his beloved Hephzibah, his cherished Beulah, only to take it up again.

The Early church loved the imagery of Christ as Bridegroom and the Church as Bride.

The writer of the Book of Revelation for example began a hymn with the words:

**“The wedding feast of the Lamb has begun
And his bride is prepared to welcome him.”**

The modern church seems skittish of the image and that’s a real shame; a shame because the image of bridegroom and bride carries an intimacy, a degree of personal relationship between God and humanity so sorely needed.

Jesus is God’s way of becoming more personally and intimately involved with our human family.

No imagery speaks this more eloquently, more powerfully than that of two people in the faithful, loving, committed bond of marriage.

We need to hear and experience the reality that God wants this very relationship with us; God want to be this close to us; God want to enfold us into his embrace this tightly.

Secondly, the image of marriage, especially young, just-married, romantic marriage, of the sort depicted in the scripture today gives us such a fresh and vibrant and even playful picture of God that we can see it in our lives and community.

We see sacraments of it in young couples in our families and community.

What a delight to think that our God in Jesus loves us they way they love each other.

And finally, maybe, just maybe, if we can recover the imagery of Jesus as Bridegroom and the Church as Bride maybe we'll again have some of our daughters named Hephzibah and Beulah.