

## Second Sunday after Epiphany, 14<sup>th</sup> January 2018

“*Quid mihi et tibi est, mulier? nondum venit hora mea* (Woman, what is that to me and to thee? my hour is not yet come)” (Jn 2:4). The Latin that I just quoted, including its faithful translation into the English of the Douay-Rheims, is itself a precise rendering of the Greek text. The Greek, in its turn (please bear with me), contains a particularly Semitic, i.e. Hebrew or Aramaic, expression: “what is that to me and to thee?” The Catholic Douay-Rheims version, (perhaps you might surprised) unlike scores of Protestant translations, has therefore preserved the original Semitic expression of our Lord spoken to our Lady. These other translations (if I may be bold enough to point out) are not as such translations but interpretations. Having said all this (and I hope you are still bearing with me?), the expression “what is that to me and to thee?” needs some sort of interpretation, so as to make more sense.

As I have said, it is a Semitic, namely a Hebrew or Aramaic, expression, and so the best thing to do is to examine the Hebrew Old Testament to find similar such expressions. And since this is a homily rather than a lecture, I will not bore you unnecessarily with the details but simply tell you that by saying “what is that to me and to thee?” two different things might be intended. Christ might be responding to the statement of his Mother, “They have no wine”, in terms either of “What have I done to you that you should do this to me?”, or of “That is your business, how am I involved?” It is obvious that the first option is less positive than the second; and that their influence would thereby give a certain colour to the way in which the story of the wedding feast at Cana is told.

From a perusal of a number of different translations it appears that all seem to opt for the second, more positive, option, and with reason since it is clear from the context that neither Christ nor indeed his Blessed Mother are picking a fight with each other, in the sense of “What have I done to you that you should do this to me?” It is therefore more a matter of finding a way of expressing the response “That is your business, how am I involved?” which is most congenial to the Gospel story. It is perhaps telling that the King James Version expresses it in a somewhat negative sense, since it has: “Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come”.

There are, as can well be imagined, a panoply of English translations, all of which seem to fall somewhere along the scale of the sublime to the faintly ridiculous. The English Version for the Deaf makes it seem as if Jesus is reacting like a teenage son towards his nagging mother: “Dear woman, you should not tell me what to do”! This slightly confrontational tone is however toned down in the New Living Translation, in which “me” and “you” are substituted for the more inclusive, and as such more positive and polite, “our”: “Dear woman, that's not our problem”. I think this albeit short (it could indeed be a lot

longer) survey of translations just shows how the response “That is your business, how am I involved?” can range from the cordial to the confrontational.

It helps if it is in fact accompanied by some kind of commentary. The Worrell New Testament, for instance, contains the footnote: “What is it to Me and to you?: We are guests, and guests are not expected to supply the things needed at a feast”. That appears to be a rather sensible explanation, based on the cultural context, yet the phrase which follows, “my hour is not yet come”, undoubtedly contains the real key for unlocking the expression, “what is that to me and to thee?” While translating “my hour is not yet come” presents no immediate difficulties; we are of course left with the question: what is this “hour”?

The recurring theme of Christ’s “hour” in St John’s Gospel points to the hour of his death: the most important hour, surely, of anyone’s life. At the start of chapter thirteen and story of the Last Supper, the evangelist informs us that: “Jesus knowing that his hour was come, that he should pass out of this world to the Father” (13:1). But what has running out of wine at a wedding to do with “his hour”, his death and subsequent resurrection? There is no obvious answer; however, prayer and meditation upon the Gospel text might provide us with a few insights.

We have just said that Christ’s “hour” seems to be connected with his death in St John: well then, how does this Gospel actually portray his death? – “Jesus therefore, when he had taken the vinegar, said: It is consummated. And bowing his head, he gave up the ghost” (Jn 19:30). These last words of his, “It is consummated”, could arguably be speaking of the consummation of a marriage. Outside the story of the wedding feast at Cana, St John’s Gospel in fact uses the word ‘bridegroom’ only in reference to Christ: “He that hath the bride [proclaims John the Baptist], is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, who standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth with joy because of the bridegroom's voice” (Jn 3:29). However, even within the account of the wedding feast at Cana Christ shows himself to be the true bridegroom; since, as was expected of the bridegroom, he supplies the wine. So when Our Lady mentions to him the lack of wine, it is as if he replies by saying: the wedding, “my hour”, has not yet come, so why should I act now as the bridegroom?

All this as such is merely a small personal reflection on the significance of “Woman, what is that to me and to thee? my hour is not yet come”. The depth of meaning offered by this phrase and indeed the whole of the wedding feast at Cana episode is as such inexhaustible, and quite rightly is it now one of the mysteries, the luminous mysteries, of the Most Holy Rosary.

It is certainly a real feast: so eat and, of course, drink from its spiritual abundance.