



THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

Father Alan's Blog

For the Second Sunday After the Epiphany - January 16, 2022

"My hour has not yet come..."

St. John 2:4b (NIV)

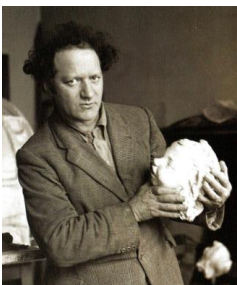
A wise but anonymous writer once penned:



"Plan ahead – it was not raining when Noah built the ark."

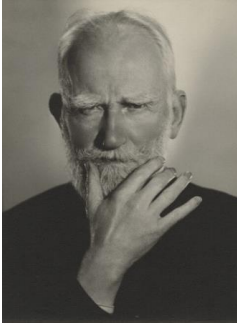
Likewise, the following item appeared in the April 5, 1993 edition of the Christian magazine, "Today in the Word":

"Noted British sculptor,



Sir Jacob Epstein,

was visited in his studio by the eminent author, and fellow Briton,



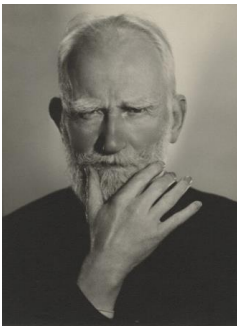
George Bernard Shaw,

who noticed a huge block of stone standing in one corner and asked what it was for. Epstein shook his head and answered:



'I don't know yet. I'm still making plans.'

Shaw was astounded:



**'You mean you PLAN your work?
Why, I change my mind several times a day!'**

To which Epstein replied:



**'That's all very well with a four-ounce manuscript,
but not with a four-ton block!'"**



I invite everyone to try to understand something very important. Granted, it may take a copious amount of mental gymnastics to accomplish, but I urge each one of us to try to wrap our



“grey matter”

around this one simple fact:

Nearly everything that our Lord Jesus Christ experienced during His lifetime on earth occurred ON PURPOSE.

Meaning that there were few accidents, few coincidences. Precious little happened to Jesus that had not been foreseen since the very beginning, since the creation of the universe. In short, virtually:

EVERY DETAIL,
EVERY MINUTE, and
EVERY SECOND

of the estimated 33 years that Jesus spent on this planet had been worked out with His Heavenly Father well in advance of Jesus' arrival as a baby in Bethlehem's stable.



In fact, even before sin entered the Garden of Eden, the shadow of the cross had already appeared on the horizon.



(Bearing this in mind, what follows borrows a great deal – and with much gratitude – from what Christian author:



Max Lucado

speculates in Chapter 15 of his 1993 book, “He Still Moves Stones”).

In short, Jesus came with a well-designed:



and we can tell by some of the phrases He used while here on earth.

Like, St. John 7:6, for instance:



"The right TIME for me has not yet come."

Or how about St. Matthew 26:18:



"The chosen TIME is near."

Or St. John 12:23:



"The TIME has come for the Son of Man to receive his glory."

Or St. Mark 14:41:



"The TIME has come for the Son of Man to be handed over to sinful people."

Or St. John 17:1:



"He looked toward heaven and prayed, 'Father, the TIME has come.'"

Now, let's ponder, for a moment, **these particular words.**



"The right TIME... has not yet come."



"The chosen TIME is near."



“The TIME has come.”

Now, what do these phrases imply? Well, how about this:



a schedule,



a definite order of events.

In a word, then:



**The earthly mission of Jesus Christ was
strategically planned – PERIOD.**

And just as was there a plan for Christ’s ministry, there would be a first miracle that Jesus would perform. And its plot, as described in today’s Gospel Lesson (St. John 2:1-11), is almost, well, **too simplistic**.

As the “Beloved Disciple” notes:



Jesus and His disciples are invited guests at a wedding in the small, Galilean village of Cana, during which the wedding feast's host runs out of wine. So, Jesus, at his mother Mary's urging, transforms six jugs of water into six jugs of wine.

That's it. That's the "lead-off hitter", so to speak. Kinda low key, don't you think? I mean, it certainly doesn't have the impact of:



raising a person from the dead, or



the flair of straightening a crippled leg, or



the pizzazz of healing the deaf or the blind.

Or DOES it?!?

Perhaps, there is more to this first miracle than we think.

You see, a wedding in Jesus' day was no small event.



It usually began with a sundown ceremony at the local synagogue.



Then, the wedding party and the invited guests would leave the synagogue and begin a long, candlelight procession through the town, winding their way in the soft, evening sunlight up and down the city streets. The newly married couple would be escorted past as many homes as possible so that everyone could wish them well.



However, following the procession, the married couple did not go on a honeymoon;

instead, (in a sense) the honeymoon was brought to them, in that they would go home to a HUGE party. For several days (or as much as a week, even) there would be gift giving and speechmaking and food eating and (of course) wine drinking – LOTS of wine drinking.

At a wedding feast in Ancient Near East society (in general) and in the Jewish culture (in particular),



food and



wine

were taken **very seriously**, with the host of the wedding feast honouring the guests by keeping their plates full and their cups overflowing.

Conversely, it was considered a **gross insult** to the guests if the host ran out of either food or wine. Truly, then, hospitality at a wedding was regarded as a “sacred duty”. (So serious were these social customs, in fact, that if they were not observed, actual lawsuits could be brought by the “injured parties”!)

Even Jewish rabbis universally held that:



"Without wine there is no joy."

Hence, wine was crucial – not for drunkenness, which was considered a disgrace – but for what it **demonstrated**. The presence of wine affirmed that this was a “special day” and that all the wedding guests were “special guests”.

In contrast, the absence of wine was seen as much more than a minor “faux pas” – indeed, it was a social embarrassment bordering on a catastrophe.

In chapter 2, verse 2 of today’s Gospel Lesson from St. John, Jesus’ mother Mary is one of the first people to notice that the wine has run out. So, she goes immediately to Jesus and points out the problem to Him, saying in verse 3:



"They have no more wine."

Only to hear Jesus’ rather terse response in verse 4:



*"Dear woman, why come to me?
My time has not yet come."*

There are those two words again:



"MY TIME."

Jesus, you see, is keenly aware of "The



"

He already has a time and a place selected for His first miracle, and this, frankly, is not it.

TO REPEAT, JESUS KNOWS "THE



"

Furthermore, Jesus has spent all of recorded history (that is, up until this apparently inopportune moment during a wedding feast in "Middle-of-Nowhere-Cana-of-Galilee") preparing to fulfill "The



"

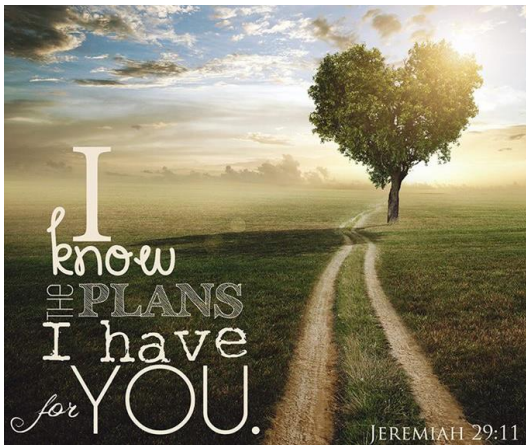
And, at first, it appears that Jesus is going to stick with "The



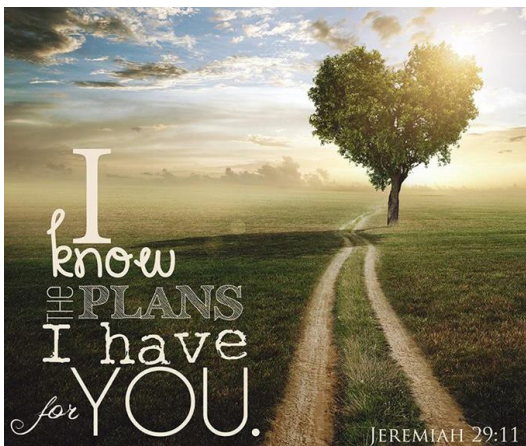
"

But, as He hears the pleading in His mother's voice, and looks into the joyous faces of the members of the wedding party and their guests, Jesus suddenly – wait for it – Jesus...RECONSIDERS.

Clearly, the significance of:



"THE Plan",



God's ETERNAL Plan,

is more than eclipsed by Jesus' concern for:



THE PEOPLE.

Mark this down:

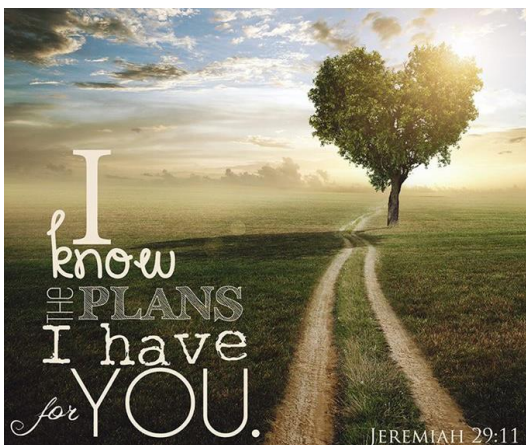


To our Lord Jesus, timing is important.



But people, well, they are much more so.

And so, as a result, Jesus changes:



“The Plan”

to meet the needs of some friends.

Incredible – Heaven’s timeless schedule is altered so some friends will not suffer embarrassment! In a word, then, Jesus’ inaugural miracle is motivated NOT by:



tragedy, or by



famine, or by



moral collapse,

but by:



His concern for some friends in a bind.

Now, Jesus' apparently "knee-jerk" reaction might have come as quite a shock – perhaps, even, as a great disappointment – to all the:



Heavenly Host (that is, all the angels and archangels)

(who were no doubt as familiar with the original plan as were:



God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit).

However, if you are a human being who has ever been embarrassed, you like Jesus' choice very much. Why?



Because Jesus' first miracle tells us, in no uncertain terms, that what matters to us matters to God.

Granted, we are all probably in agreement with the above statement (when it comes to the “big stuff”, that is). Certainly, when it comes to “major-league” difficulties like:



sin,



disease,



disaster, and



death,

we know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that God cares.

But what about the smaller, less-crucial things? What about:



grouchy bosses; or



flat tires; or



lost pets?

What about:



late flights; or



toothaches; or



crashed hard drives?

Do these minor annoyances **even matter** to God? I mean, after all, He's got a universe to run. He's got:



the stars and planets to keep in balance; and



countries and world leaders to watch over.

He's got:

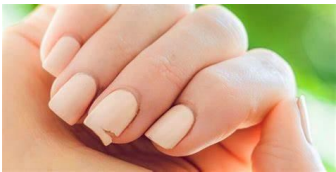


wars to deal with; and



famines to fix.

So, just who are we to tell Him about:



broken fingernails; or



bulging waistlines; or



getting royally soaked waiting for the bus?

Well, how about this for starters:

"We are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ."

What is more:

"We were chosen before the creation of the world."

(As St. Paul confidently assures us in Romans 8:17 and Ephesians 1:4, respectively.)

Or as Moses himself confirms in Deuteronomy 26:19:

"We are destined for praise, fame, and honour and we will be holy people to the Lord our God."

But even more than any of these – and more significant than any title or position – is the simple fact that:

WE ARE GOD'S CHILDREN



we are God's children,

as St. John reminds us (1 St. John 3:1a):

"The Father has loved us so much that we are called children of God. And we really are His children."

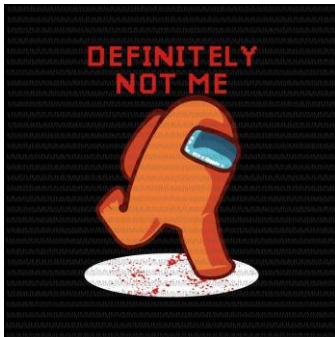
(You know, I absolutely LOVE that last phrase:

WE ARE GOD'S CHILDREN



"We really ARE His children."

It's as if St. John knew that some of us would shake our heads and say something like:



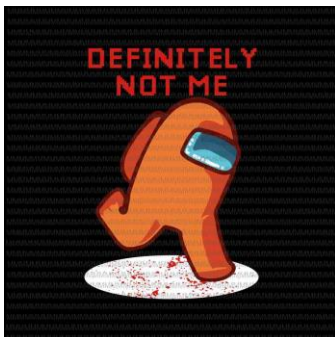
"Naw, not me.



Mother Teresa, maybe.



Billy Graham, all right.



But certainly not me."

If that is truly how some of us feel, then St. John added that phrase specifically for us to "mark, learn, and inwardly digest".

WE ARE GOD'S CHILDREN



"We really ARE His children."

And, as a result, if something is important – to any one of us – it is important to our Heavenly Father. End of statement.)

Still finding it hard to believe? Well, try to imagine, for a moment, being a parent and you happen to notice an infected sore on the hand of your seven-year-old daughter. You ask her what's wrong and she tells you that:



she has a splinter.

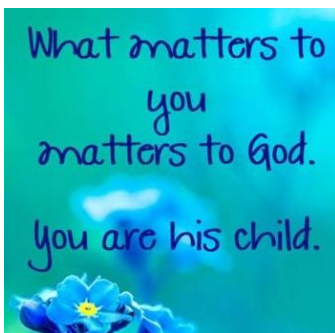
You then ask her when it happened, and she replies LAST WEEK! Incredulous, you ask why she didn't tell you and you are told:

"I didn't want to bother you. I knew you had all those things to do running the household and all, and I didn't want to get in your way."

Dumbfounded, you manage to stammer:

"Get in MY WAY?!? Get in MY WAY?!? I'm your parent. You're my daughter. My job is to help you. For when you hurt, I hurt."

In the exact same way:



because we are God's children, if it's important to us, then it's important to Him.

I began today's message by using words like:



and "few":



to describe the minor exceptions to the rule of the precise heavenly plan for Jesus' time on Earth.

So, I need to ask:



Why DID Jesus change the water into wine?

Was it to impress the wedding guests? (No, they didn't even realize that He had done it.) Then, was it to get the wedding feast host's attention? (No, he thought that the groom was simply being overly generous.)

So why "on earth" did Jesus do it?



I remember my first Diocesan Bishop in the Anglican Catholic Church of Canada – the same man, by the way, who made me a deacon and eventually ordained me as a priest in the Church of God:



The Right Reverend Robert W. Mercer,

telling me one day of his own experience as a newly-minted priest in parish ministry. As a young man, Bishop Mercer said, he was sure that the Bible was full of “absolutes,” that everything was either:



and that there were **absolutely** no:



He then proceeded to tell me that it only took **one week** working at his first pastoral charge for him to completely change his mind – and his heart. Because he quickly found out that there were things known as, “extenuating circumstances”, that life just didn’t fit very neatly into theological:



pigeonholes,

and that to be truly “Christ-like”, a priest must deal with all situations on a case-by-case basis.

(You know, I truly believe that Bishop Robert Mercer really got the message behind Jesus’ first miracle of changing water into wine at a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee:



that what matters to us, matters to God.)



So again, I need to ask:



Why DID Jesus change the water into wine?

More to the point:

What **motivated** Jesus to do it? Near as I can tell, it's because:

1

His friends were going to be embarrassed;

2

What would bother them bothered Him; and

3

If it hurts the Child, it hurts the Father.

It's that simple.

Accordingly, this Second Sunday After the Epiphany, let's take a page out of St. John's Gospel, specifically chapter 2, verses 1-11.



Let's go ahead and tell God what hurts us.



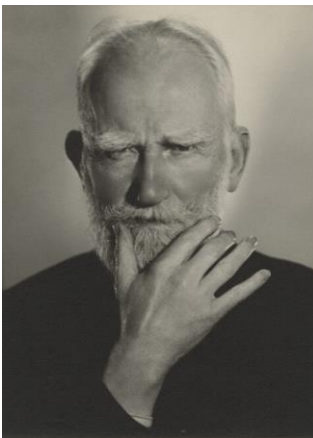
Let's talk to Him as a child would to a loving parent.

And I promise:

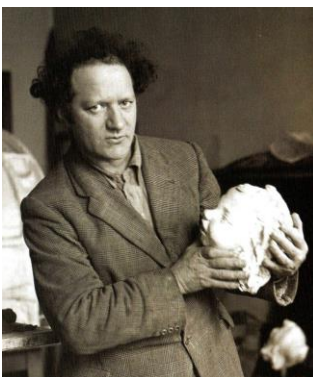


our Heavenly Father won't turn us away.

What's more, whether it's our version of a:



"four-ounce manuscript"; or



"four-ton block",

Almighty God won't think that our particular concern is unimportant or insignificant. For as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews promises us (4:15-16):

"For our High Priest is able to understand our weaknesses. When He lived on earth, He was tempted in every way that we are, but He did not sin. Let us, then, feel very sure that we can come before God's throne where there is grace."

So, does God care about the little things in our lives? We'd better:



If nothing else, Jesus' first (and, undoubtedly, **unplanned**) miracle at a wedding in "Middle-of-Nowhere-Cana-of-Galilee" assures us that if it matters to us, then we can be **absolutely** sure that it matters to Him.

And we can all:



on that.



Dearest Reader in Christ:

These blogs are offered for your prayerful consideration and spiritual encouragement.

If you wish to use them for some other purpose or to republish them in any form, please credit

The Mission of Saint Mary Magdalene and Fr. Alan Edwardson.