

A REFLECTION ON THE READINGS FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY OF THE YEAR – JOHN 2:1-11

(The author of these reflections is a friend of Fr Jock living in Northumberland)

My washing machine ground to a halt ten days ago. I hate the idea of inbuilt obsolescence, so set about cruising 'YouTube' looking for helpful tips at effecting a repair. After four days and goodness knows how many hours, I admitted defeat. The self-repair videos were calling for a skill-set way beyond my ability. All the while my pile of dirty laundry grew and took on the appearance of a mini-Matterhorn. I like to think that I manage stress quite well but was struggling this time. The machine was 'of good make' and had been a willing and reliable workhorse. I didn't want to scrap it, and, in despair, I telephoned the manufacturer's helpline. I was asked for a serial number. The machine was out of warranty (tell me something I didn't know!) and I was given a quote for an 'out of warranty' repair - £200 plus parts plus VAT. If this quote was aimed at frightening me, it succeeded, but when it was quickly followed by an offer to scrap the machine in favour of a new model with a discount of £200, (a rather convenient figure), I smelled a rat. I was being bribed to throw 'stuff' away and buy some new 'stuff'. My mini-Matterhorn continued to grow as I planned the next course of action. I telephoned a local tradesman. His call-out charge was a modest £30, and he repaired the machine promptly and speedily with his final bill coming in at £45 plus VAT. Like me, he hated discarding perfectly serviceable goods. My relief was palpable, not only because the financial hit was to be so small, but because I could get to work on the pile of laundry before me! As far as stress goes, it was hardly insurmountable, but the relief at having a working washing machine and being able to attack the Matterhorn before me was immense.

Stress is one of those silent enemies that has the potential to substantially shorten our lives. We all know what stress involves. Even babes in the womb can display and feel stress and studies suggest that stress experienced in a mother in the first trimester can have disastrous consequences on the developing baby's brain. If we have experienced stress then we can all imagine the levels of stress experienced by the bride, groom, and the immediate family at the wedding at Cana in Galilee. There was not enough wine to see through the rest of the celebration. Stress levels were rising even as the wine levels were falling. They tried to eke out the wine by adding a little water to each flagon. They could only do this so many times before the wine would be spoiled. Mothers, and women in general, are often possessing of a sixth sense, an awareness that bypasses many men. When my mother was alive nothing escaped her observation, no matter how big the room or sizeable the crowd. Mary noticed the family flapping around, the worried look on the faces of the steward and servants. It's easy to picture the scene. Jesus is talking to someone else at table and Mary reaches out and gently touches his arm. 'Excuse me a second' he says to the other guest. He inclines his head towards his mother. She reaches up to whisper in his ear. The musicians are in full flow, and he struggles to hear. Mary does not want to embarrass the groom by shouting, so whispers again, but slightly louder. "There's no wine left" He looks around, and with a shrug of his shoulders asks: 'What do you want me to do about it?' John has sanitised his response somewhat, but we get the gist. *'Woman, why turn to me? My hour has not come yet.'*

The miracle is probably the one we remember best from our childhood. The real miracle, perhaps, lies not in the physical transformation of the water, but in the ability of Jesus to bring wholeness and healing to any situation – even stressful ones. Many times, did I awaken on the morning after a 'heavy night'. I had little or no recollection of how the night had ended. Stress levels were in the ascendancy as I sought a friendly face. I nervously asked: 'Did I make a fool of myself last night?' 'No!' 'But you were in a bit of a state!' Relief after stress is for me akin to luxuriating in a warm bath with a cup of hot chocolate! (How my tastes have changed!) We have all experienced the sheer relief to be had from a comforting trip to the confessional box where we made a good confession, of sharing a burden and feeling it being lifted even as we spoke. Jesus always wants to remove our stress. *Come to me all ye who labour...* The miracle at Cana happened after Mary's words: *'Do whatever he tells you'*. She says the same to us. We do well to take her words to heart.