

*Spiritually Speaking*

# Do whatever He tells you (Jn 2:5)

By Fr. Thankachan Joseph

In the last two Sundays' celebrations we have reflected on the manifestation of the Lord. This Sunday we will reflect on Jesus's self-manifestation at the wedding feast in Cana. As we enter into the ordinary season of liturgical celebrations, it begins with the gracious presence of our blessed Mother and Jesus in the wedding house at Cana. The readings of Ordinary Time always bring us close to the Lord in His humanitarian tasks. Knowing Jesus in His humanity draws us to His divinity.



Fr. Thankachan Joseph

The Prophet Isaiah (62:1-5), though Jerusalem and the temple are in ruin after the conquest, reminds the people of God that when Jerusalem is filled with the glory of the Lord, it has a different existence. The prophet is trying to describe to us that God cannot be silent any longer. God loves His bride, the Church, the people redeemed by His Son. God wants to rejoice in His people and wants His people to rejoice in Him. The prophet describes the glory and beauty of Jerusalem when it is filled with God's glory.

The First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians (12:4-11) describes the different kinds of spiritual gifts and the diverse forms of services used to serve the Lord. St. Paul bluntly explains the multiple types of gifts present in each of us and how we should use these personal gifts to please the Lord. Each of us has gifts and we are to use them to build up the body of Christ, to benefit others. Perhaps we think that our gifts are negligible. Perhaps we think that others have better or more important gifts than ours. That does not matter, whatever we are given, it is given to us for others.

The miracle of changing water into wine at the Wedding Feast at Cana is only marked in the Gospel of John (2:1-11) alone; we have no reference to it in any of the synoptic gospels. The Gospel of John can be divided into two major parts: Chapters 1-12:50 as the Book of Signs, and chapters 13 to 20:29 as the Book of Glory. In the first part, John explains six major signs performed by Jesus during His public ministry. The wedding at Cana is the first sign He performed, the first of the signs that reveal His glory. Changing water to wine shows that, if we pay attention, we shall see the divinity shining through Christ's humanity. This is another Epiphany, a manifestation of the divine.

I have noted a slight difference in my reference Bible and the missal that we follow in our worship.. The Bible I used to write this article begins with these words: "On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee." It is very interesting to note that in this wedding celebration we don't hear much about the bride or the groom – at the end of the story the groom appears only briefly. It was Jewish customary practice that the marriage celebration went on for nearly seven days. The third day is open to several interpretations: It is the third day of Jesus's public ministry. Another explanation is that after leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, Moses brought them to Mount Sinai, where the Lord offered a covenant relationship to Israel. We read in Exodus (19:16) that, "On the morning of the third day the Lord appears on Mount Sinai in his awesome power and reveals his 'glory'" (Deu5:24).

Marriage is actually a covenant relationship. The bride and the groom pledge to live a lifetime together in their joy and happy moments as well as through difficulties. Similarly, to this miracle of changing water into wine, the bride and the groom are brought together by the Lord to live together forever, as a new wine, as a new family.

I was impressed by the words of Mother Mary. She tells the servants, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). Families on the verge of dividing and breaking away need to pay attention to these words. What must I do for my family, my spouse and others to make them happy and contented? Jesus is always willing to help, even when a miracle is not required. Am I willing to help others when they need me? Am I willing to give my time and my energy to reaching out to other members of the family when it has no benefit for me?

# Lindsay appointed as AOC legislative committee treasurer

Morrow County Commissioner Melissa Lindsay has been appointed for the second year in a row to the treasurer seat on Association of Oregon County's (AOC) legislative committee. Her work may include testifying before state legislative committees and advancing counties' state policy priorities at events and meetings. The AOC Legislative Committee formulates public policies

and legislative positions, including policies and positions on state or federal legislation, and directs the legislative activities of the executive director and AOC legislative affairs team.

"I am pleased to be elected to this position for the second year in a row. Serving on the Association of Oregon Counties executive team gives me the ability to connect closely with fellow commissioners and staff

from around the state and share our Morrow County message. The three current commissioners have been active at AOC, seeing the benefits, with Commissioner Doherty serving as the President in 2020," Lindsay told the Gazette.



Melissa Lindsay

Legislative committee membership consists of the AOC Board of Directors, one additional member from each of the eight AOC districts, the chair and vice chair of each AOC steering committee, one district attorney designated by the Oregon District Attorneys Association, and any additional members that the board of directors choose to appoint, such as a county not otherwise represented

## WIND TURBINES

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as advertised. "With the current system they are on more than they are off. It's a shame to see because they have the system in place," said Seitz. "I don't know what's wrong with it," he told the commissioners.

Commissioner, and newly elected chairman, Jim Doherty said he has had "a half dozen discussions" with NextEra about the lighting system with no satisfactory answers from the company. "Every time we talk to them, they give us some version of: 'the system is trying to figure itself out. It will get up to speed and it will start to work,'" Doherty relates. He suggested the company is not holding to the letter of the contract signed with the county, and perhaps their tax abatement deal should be revisited. "At what point have they defaulted on that because the system is not functioning?" he asked.

In the agreement, Wheatridge, which is owned by NextEra and Portland General Electric received special property tax breaks through the Strategic Investment Program (SIP) from Morrow County. Assessor Mike Gorman said he was involved with NextEra negotiating on the tax breaks, and with the lighting system not working correctly he would be willing to contact the company. "I was involved with negotiations. The intent was to have the lights off more than they were on unless an aircraft was coming by at night. I am more than happy

drafting a letter to NextEra explaining the intent (of the agreement) and explaining the problem," he told the commissioners. "And I could suggest their SIP exemption may be in jeopardy if they don't address this problem," he added.

Russell said he has talked to lighting system manufactures and believes occasionally there was going to be a pilot that flies into Lexington at night and trips the lights on, or there is going to be a military jet from the bombing range that trips the lights. "But most of the time the lights would be off. At night nobody should be flying that low. There are certain standards if you are a pilot, and you should not be flying that low. You should never fly less than 1,000 feet above the ground out there unless there was an emergency landing. I personally think they are in violation (of their agreement)," Russell said. Seitz said there are two sensors that detect aircraft, one up north closer to the Bombing Range and one closer to south county.

After discussion, the county agreed to have Gorman draft a letter to NextEra telling them once more of the lighting problem and suggesting they could be in violation of their tax abatement agreement if it is not fixed. "If the technology just doesn't work that is one thing, but if it works and they are not using best efforts to make it work, that is something else," Russell

concluded.

### COVID and mandate update

In other business at the meeting commissioners discussed a proposed COVID testing and vaccination policy toward employees if mandates are enacted from either the federal or state governments.

The county currently has about 123 employees with 56 indicating they are vaccinated. If the mandates come down, they will most likely require all unvaccinated workers to take a weekly test and prove negative for COVID. Commissioners are still up in the air about what the county policy will be. First, they are not sure which mandate they will have to follow, either state or federal, and second, who will pay for the testing if it is required. County officials are also concerned about a rush on testing kit purchases and not enough available to give their employees. "We have a couple of decisions: one is who pays? Is testing going to be issue? Availability of testing. They will have to provide proof of a negative test every week. If you can't provide that proof, then you can't come to work. That is the way I read it," said Russell. He said he was in favor of the county paying for the tests.

The federal mandate right now is tied up at the Supreme Court which so far has not given a ruling, and the state policy is supposed to be coming out on January 24, so the county does have some time to make

decisions. Commissioner Lindsay said if the county does pay for testing, then it should give the same amount of money it spends there to vaccinated workers as compensation for a benefit of paying for the unvaccinated tests. Undersheriff John Bowles also pointed out that it may become a union issue if the county requires workers to pay for tests, and he feels the county should pay for the tests.

County Emergency Manager Paul Gray said the last he checked test prices ran around \$6.99 each for an individual test and \$13.98 for two tests and a kit. Russell said with his calculations it would cost the county about \$280 per week to test all the unvaccinated workers, and with today's tight labor market that might be a good idea to keep their employees. He also said from his experiences, vaccination is not proving to be much of a deterrent to catching the virus. "My personal knowledge is that vaccinated people are getting the new mutated virus as often as unvaccinated people. May be lesser severity of the disease, but personally I know a ton of people who have been fully vaccinated that have contracted COVID. Even boosted people," he related.

In other business, the commissioners appointed Eric Imes interim public works director. Imes has been the assistant road master for the county for almost four years and he replaces Matt Scrivner who recently resigned.

## Morrow County schools receive clean audit

The Morrow County School District (MCSD) received an unmodified audit opinion for their annual financial statements, the 10<sup>th</sup> consecutive year the district has received a "clean" report.

Independent firm Dickey and Tremper, LLP performed the audit for the 2020-21 fiscal year. The school board reviewed the audit report at its January 10 regular meeting.

Among the financial highlights in the report:

-MCSD carried a surplus of \$475,343. This is because of additional support from federal, state and local grants, including COVID grants, the State Student Investment Account and the Morrow Education Foundation.

-Using increased funding from these sources, MCSD added four instructional days to the school calendar, hired eight staff, including three counselors, and continued wraparound services to provide mental health services, CARE coordinators and Safety Resource Officers.

-MCSD carried a PERS Reserve Fund of \$1,448,889 and did not spend any of the fund. The auditor also noted that MCSD carries liabilities

for PERS (\$25.3 million) and health insurance (\$2.6 million), common for government agencies across the state.

-Investment on MCSD property included two driveways/parking lots to accommodate increased traffic, roofing and masonry repairs, air-conditioning units, security cameras and water heaters.

-MCSD completed on-time repayment of the voter-approved general obligation bond for capital improvement from 2001.

-Though the COVID-19 pandemic forced students to begin the school year with limited in-person instruction, MCSD pivoted to full-day instruction by the end of September for non-quarantined students and used federal funding to purchase technology needed for online learning.


"It's a credit to our entire staff, our partners at the IMESD and the school board that the Morrow County school consistently receives high marks for financial accountability," said Dirk Dirksen, Superintendent of the Morrow County School District. "Our mission is to invest in the education and development of every student,

every day, and we know that Morrow County communities expect us to do that responsibly."

The complete audit is available on the Morrow County School District website at <https://sil.co/1454y>.

Morrow County School District is located in rural

north central Oregon. The county encompasses more than 2,000 square miles with a growing population of over 12,000 in the four main communities of Boardman and Irrigon, along the Columbia River, and Heppner and Lexington, in the foothills of the Blue Mountains.



The Heppner Chamber of Commerce would like to thank the merchants and Individuals that donated to and assisted with the Celebrate Heppner Community Christmas Event.

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