



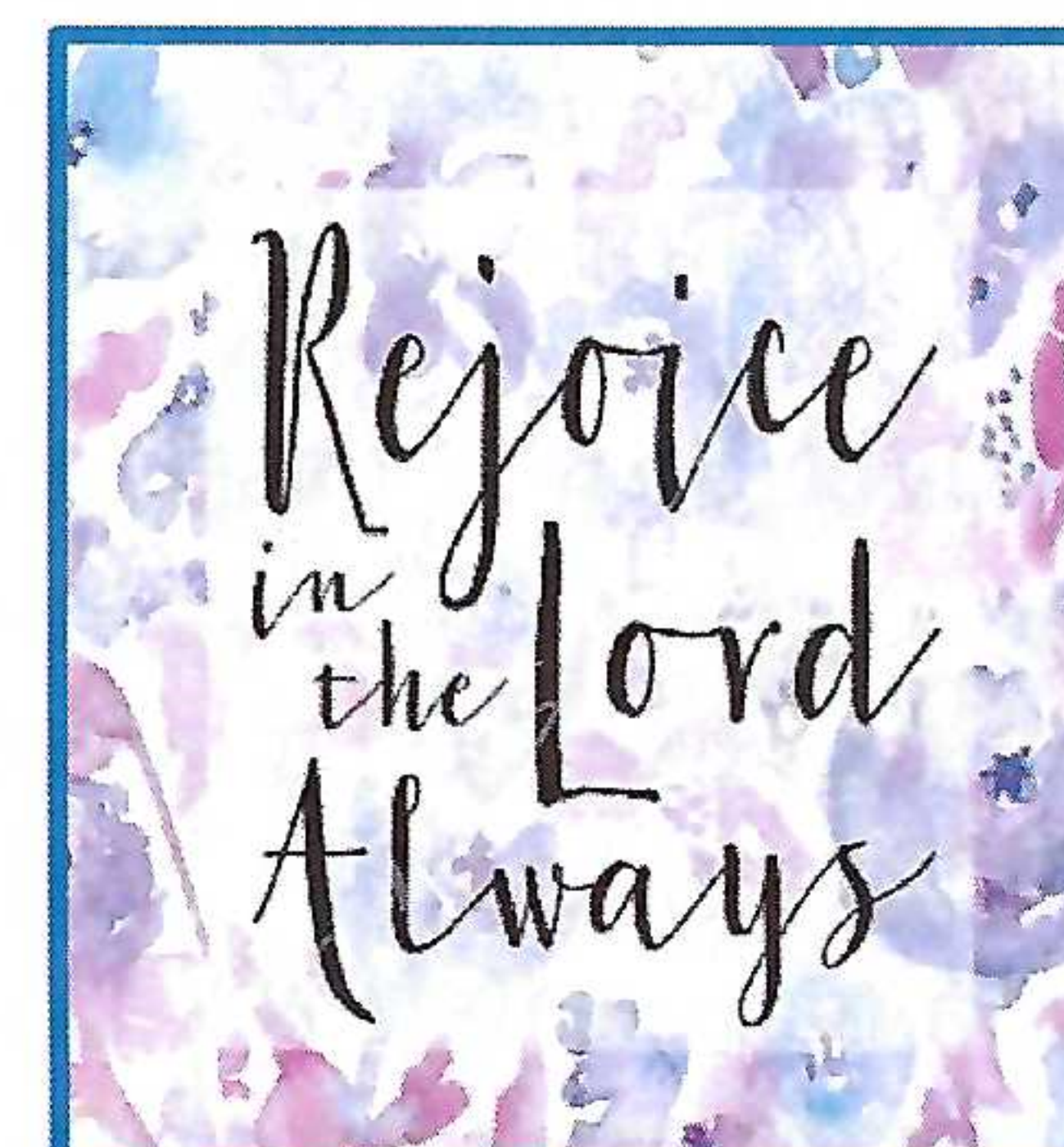
In this week's Gospel, John 2:1-11, we find the last recorded words of our Blessed Mother: "Do whatever he [Jesus] tells you." Never has any mother given more sound advice to her children! Mary spoke these words to the servers at the wedding at Cana. We know the story: Mary had brought her concern to Jesus, "They have no wine." Jesus responded, "Woman, how does your concern affect me?" Evidently, her concern *did* affect Jesus because a few minutes later Jesus turned about 150 gallons of water into the finest of wines! This was Jesus' first miracle; what was the result? The Gospel says his glory was revealed and "his disciples began to believe in him" (vs. 11).

Of course, volumes have been written on the significance of Jesus' first miracle and there are numerous ramifications. Here, I would like to consider a simple yet important aspect of Jesus' first miracle: it inspired joy.

In the first century, Jewish nuptial festivities lasted a week and were called in Aramaic *mištîṭâ* (drink-festival). In connection with these "drink-festivals" there arose a rabbinical dictum: "Where there is no wine, there is no joy" [Leonard, W. (1953). *The Gospel of Jesus Christ according to St John, A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* (D. B. Orchard & E. F. Sutcliffe, Ed.) (983). Thomas Nelson]. Thus, among all the consequences of Jesus' miracle there is one simple effect: it brought joy to the bride and groom and all the guests—it enabled them to fittingly celebrate one of the great joys of life: marriage. The fact is, Jesus came that we might have life and have it more abundantly (Jn 10:10). The first two fruits of the spirit are love and joy (Gal 5:22); "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of food and drink, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17).

So just as the wine enabled all present at the wedding to celebrate life, so the "new wine" – the wine of the Holy Spirit – enables the Christian soul to discover and celebrate the true meaning of life and experience it with "joy in the Holy Spirit." The miracle which inspired joy would not have happened if not for Mary's concern and her intercession; at the same time, the obedience of the servants who did what Jesus commanded by filling the jars with water was also a necessary prerequisite. As at the wedding at Cana, the supernatural joy which only Jesus can supply is contingent upon the intercession and obedience of God's children. Ultimately, Mary's simple exhortation is not only the key to a happy, meaningful, life on earth; but it is also the key to the Kingdom of Heaven and eternal life: "Do whatever he tells you!" This is the recipe for the miracle of spiritual joy.

Your Servant in Christ,
Fr. Terry Staples





Saint Sebastian

Feast Day: January 20

Born: Around 256 AD

Died: Around 287 AD

Patron: Soldiers, athletes, and those seeking a saintly death

Sebastian, the son of a nobleman, was born in Narbonne, Gaul (modern-day France) and raised in Milan, Italy, in a devout Roman Catholic family. As a young man, Sebastian joined the Roman army in 283 AD, keeping his Christian beliefs secret, as he was driven by a desire to assist imprisoned Christians during a time of intense persecution.

Some Christians who knew the truth about Sebastian brought a woman named Zoe to him. She had lost the power of speech. Sebastian prayed with her and she quickly recovered. As a result, many people who knew her became Christians. Around the same time, Emperor Diocletian promoted Sebastian to be guard of the Praetorian Guard, a regimen that acted as the emperor's own bodyguard. Diocletian hated all Christians and had no idea someone in his trusted office was leading a double life. Sebastian's role as a Praetorian Guard afforded him significant authority and social power in Rome, which he used to support and comfort Christian prisoners.

Sebastian's true faith was eventually discovered when he intervened to strengthen the resolve of twin brothers, Marcus and Marcellianus, who were imprisoned for their Christian beliefs. His impassioned encouragement not only bolstered the brothers' faith but also led to the conversion of their parents, sixteen prisoners, and over 60 others. This act of spiritual leadership marked a turning point in Sebastian's life, as it exposed his Christian identity to the Roman authorities. Upon learning of Sebastian's faith, Emperor Diocletian, known for his brutal persecution of Christians, sentenced him to death. Sebastian was stripped and tied to a tree. His fellow officers used him as a target for archery practice, and arrow after arrow were shot into him. A Christian woman named Irene came to rescue his body and was amazed to discover that Sebastian was still alive. She cared for his many wounds and nursed him back to health. He refused to flee after he recovered. Instead in an act of extraordinary courage, the recovered Sebastian confronted Emperor Diocletian, admonishing him for his persecution of Christians. This bold action led to Sebastian's second and final martyrdom. Enraged by Sebastian's survival and defiance, Diocletian ordered him to be beaten to death with clubs and his body thrown into Rome's main sewer. A Christian woman name Lucina retrieved Sebastian's body and buried him in the catacombs beneath Rome. Nearly 80 years after his death, his remains were moved to a basilica in Rome built by Pope Damasus I.

Reflection: Sebastian's life exemplifies unwavering faith, courage, and resilience in the face of persecution. His journey from a Roman soldier to a Christian Martyr continues to inspire believers across generations. His dual martyrdom, miraculous survival of the arrow attack, and his bold confrontation with Emperor Diocletian have cemented his place in Christian history and art. Sebastian remains a powerful figure in Catholic tradition, embodying the virtues of steadfastness and sacrifice for one's Christian beliefs.