

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Sep 4th 2015

Faced with the question Why do your disciples not fast like the Pharisees' disciples and John's disciples? Jesus could have simply said: Because they are not disciples of either the Pharisees or John the Baptist. Instead, he answers them with two images that carry his response.

First image: Can the wedding guests fast, while the groom is with them? He may have been extrapolating from Qo/Eccl 3:1-8: There is a time to fast and a time to abstain from fasting. And he elaborates: As long as I am with my disciples, it is not the time for them to fast. The day will come, but not now.

Second image: I am bringing a new spirit and you are not capable of receiving it. The English language allows us to play on the word spirit as alcoholic drink and I do not know if the Aramaic language allows for that, but Jesus uses the ambiguous word anyhow: new wine must be poured into new skins. It is not wise to try and force new insights into those who are used to older ones. They will say the old is good, indeed good enough for them, and the new wine will spoil the old skins, causing them to burst and go itself wasted.

And yet the Church keeps serving us new wine, new spirit, as its self-understanding and its understanding of God's revelation, as well as its articulation of both, keep unfolding as they have done over more than twenty centuries. The Lord promised the apostles that he would send them a Paraclete, who would lead you to the complete truth [Jn. 16:12]. The Spirit would lead them dynamically to the complete truth, not establish them statically in possession of the complete truth. It is this newness, this new wine to which the Church continues to be led, that the Church keeps offering.

But attempting to force this new wine into hearts that are not prepared to receive it is not necessarily the Lord's way. As people of good will, we need to remain aware that some people also of good will are not capable of receiving it and to avoid attempting to force it in. There will always be a lag in the Church's dynamic growth, a lag that is often generational in nature, and we need to respect that. But the Church as a whole must continue to allow the Spirit to lead it to an ever more complete truth and we need to remain open to this newness brought in by Christ's Spirit.

Luis Rodriguez, S.J.-Creighton University Jesuit Community