

**ECHOING GOD’S WORD
IN THE
CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 28, 2022**

SCRIPTURES:

Sirach 3:17-29	The humble will find favor with the Lord.
Hebrews 12:18-24	With Jesus Christ, we have come close to a gentle God.
Luke 14:1,7-14	God will exalt those who humble themselves.

BIBLE BACKGROUND:

Luke:

In Luke 9:51 to 19:27, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. The journey serves as a model for the Christian community on its way to the heavenly kingdom. Jesus instructs his disciples, and us, in the requirements for “kingdom living.” Chapter 14 has two parts: verses 1 to 24: the inclusive nature of the kingdom banquet, and verses 25 to 33: the demands of discipleship repeated.

Jesus has been invited as a guest to a meal at the home of a Pharisee. He ends up playing the role of host there, and, at the banquet to which he summons us, he provides the “food” of his teaching. Every meal in Luke’s Gospel is an image of the eucharistic assembly, a promise of the great banquet in heaven. Jesus was invited because he was a well-known preacher. Whom should the Pharisee have invited? Beggars, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Those are the ones to be invited to God’s banquet. Luke means to teach the Church concerning whom we should welcome at our eucharistic meals.

The New American Bible translation in its Revised New Testament uses the word “poor” instead of “beggars” at the head of the list of those who should have priority of invitation. That is surely a better choice. “The poor, as well as those with physical and moral deformities,” were specifically excluded from ritually clean gatherings in Jewish law. Jesus reverses that prescription and puts those first among the guests. Luke’s community would have heard this teaching with particular attention. They needed to invite in their gatherings on earth the very assembly that God will gather in heaven.

Table manners were strictly prescribed and strictly observed in the Greco-Roman world. People invited those who would invite them in return. The machinery of social and economic success needed to be oiled with lavish entertainments. “Power luncheons” were not invented by the movers and shakers of Wall Street or of Madison Avenue. Banquet tables were arranged in a “U” shape, with the place of greatest honor at the base of the “U.” Next, those to the right and to the left, all the way to the ends, were graded in diminishing importance.

Already in the Book of Proverbs, Jesus would have often heard it read: “Claim no honor in the king’s presence, nor occupy the place of the great; for it is better that you be told, ‘Come up closer!’ than that you be humbled before the prince” (Proverbs 25:6-7). The ancient rabbis had taught that one should always seat oneself two or three places lower than one has a right to, so that the host will say: “Come up, come up,” and not say, “Go down, go down!”

Our Lectionary selection omits verses 2 to 6 at the beginning of this chapter. There, we

would have heard that Jesus cured a man afflicted with *dropsy* or *edema*, a condition where the body retains too much fluid, perhaps due to excessive use of sodium in the diet. Luke uses this incident to illustrate Jesus' response to the growing hostility which the religious establishment has towards him. When the Pharisees refuse to answer his question about whether a valued family member, a child, or an ox, should not be saved from death even on a Sabbath day, Jesus launches into this "wisdom teaching" for the New Covenant. Christian truth requires that people be humble; it is up to God to exalt the human person.

Sirach:

The Church has chosen another "wisdom teaching" from the Hebrew Scriptures to accompany our Gospel passage. The Greek philosophers said, "Man is the measure of all things." The Jewish "wisdom teachers" (philosophers) said, "*God* is the measure of all things." Jewish youths being taught the virtues proper to those who will exercise leadership in the community are warned against arrogance and pride. *Humility* is proper for someone whose true leader is God whom the human leader will represent. Gentiles may inflate their egos with pride in worldly knowledge. God's people leave the knowledge of secular affairs up to those who are committed to those affairs.

Hebrews:

Continuing our reading of the Book of Hebrews, we find an exhortation addressed to Jewish Christians who might find it difficult to maintain their allegiance to Christ. The author asserts that the way of Christ is far superior to the ancient ways of their ancestors. Christ mediates the very presence of God to those who approach him. "To come near" is to become identified with the One we approach. In liturgy, the Christian has touched the very presence of God in Christ Jesus. That is far superior to what one can "come near" by the ritual observances of the Law of Moses.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever been invited to a party and realized that you were there because the host or hostess is using you to "make points" with the neighbors? How did you feel about being "used" in that way? Have you ever noticed that some people try to use their Church connections to advance themselves politically or in their business? How do you feel about that?
2. What do you and your family need to do in order to respond to Jesus' teaching that the Pharisee should have invited the poor, etc.? Who are those people in our society who seem to be excluded from Church fellowship? Do you think the poor and those with disabilities feel very welcome at your gatherings? What can you do to improve that?
3. Discuss what the meaning of "Christian humility" is. Does it mean that you have to allow people to abuse you, to exploit you, to walk all over you? What does it really mean? Why is it that it is up to God to do the exalting of human persons?

PRAYER FOR A WORK DAY

**God our Creator, we are the work of your hands.
Guide us in our work,
that we may do it, not for self alone,
but for the common good.
Make us alert to injustice,
ready to stand in solidarity,
that there may be dignity for all
in labor and in labor's rewards.
Grant this through Christ our Lord, Amen.**

“Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers”

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE:

Throughout the Scriptures, God always seems to be at work gathering people. The Lord gathers Abraham from the land of Ur among the Chaldeans, gathers him to himself, along with his family, his friends, and his flocks, to make of them a great nation. God calls Moses from the desolation of being a fugitive, sends him back to his own people in Egypt, and gathers them all from there out of slavery into freedom; gathers them at the foot of Sinai to give them the blessing of his law. God leads them into the Promised Land where they will be his special people. God will gather the exiles out of Babylon and restore them to their land and to Jerusalem.

Jesus gathers disciples to himself and sends them to proclaim the kingdom where God will gather all the nations.

God does not want us to be saved alone. God wants us to be in community. God, who is community in the very inner life of God's being, in the Trinity of Persons, wants all of creation and particularly the people of all times and all places to be united to one another as we come near to our destiny.

The sin of all humanity is to want to be alone, to want to be the only one, the sin of pride, which is the refusal of the call to community. So strong is our inclination to sin that when we cannot be alone or the only one in God's kingdom. Then, we try to exclude others or categories of others. We discriminate; we show preferences for some and dispatch others to the outside.

Exclusivity is a personal temptation, and it is a Church temptation. We try to isolate ourselves from those we do not consider worthy. And we try to impose those choices of ours on God.

Jesus knew the inclinations of the human heart better than any of us can ever know them. At his birth, God had sent the news of his birth to the poor, the lowly, and those who were foreigners such as the shepherds and the Magi. Jesus reached out to sinners, to lepers, to women, to the poor.

In relating these events and teachings from the life of Jesus, the evangelists were speaking also to conditions within the early Church communities where the poor were sometimes ignored and Gentiles had a hard time being accepted. Have things changed very much?

The Church must always strive to become a more effective sign and sacrament of the Lord's unifying love among the people of the earth. We must do our part in our corner of the Church.