

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Our scripture passage for this Sunday comes from the Gospel Luke 14:1, 7–14. In this passage, Jesus is once again in the home of a Pharisee and sharing a meal. This happens a lot in Luke's Gospel and it's for a reason. Luke is not only telling us about something that happened during the historical life of Jesus. Rather, Luke is really speaking to the early Christian community and addressing issues taking place in the life of the early Church. Thus, Luke is telling us that there are certain attitudes and behaviors that can be divisive in the Christian community. Let's study this passage to see what the Lord may be saying to us as disciples.

At the dinner in the home of the Pharisee, Jesus notices how people were competing with one another so they could be seated in privileged places. In doing so, they were claiming honor for themselves and hoping that others would admire them because of their position at the table. Jesus lived in an honor-based society there were a variety of ways in which people tried to seek honor. Other examples of ways in which people sought honor included displays of material wealth (homes, clothes, lavish dinners), causing others to be socially embarrassed or ridiculed, confusing or baffling another person with questions, or even physical assaults (especially slaps to the face). In response to this endless competition for self-honor, Jesus offers an instruction about the nature of honor itself; real honor is not that which we claim for ourselves but what we are given by another, especially God. The dinner guests were concerned about the "externals" of life (exclusive positions, fine clothes, pricey toys, nice house, being invited to the best social events, appearing better than others, and so forth) and so they competed for those things in order to be the center of attention. How familiar that sounds for our world as well! The message of Jesus is just as important for us as it was to the people of our Lord's own time. The competition for honor creates an endless addiction that is never satisfying for very long. It causes people to have a false image that is based on the externals of life rather than a deeply rooted relationship with God. It also causes a person to base their self-worth on other people's opinions. Jesus wants disciples who willingly and intentionally choose to not pursue the false honors of the world.

What are the status symbols that most tempt people today to claim honor for themselves so as to be admired/respected by others?

Some people become so wrapped up in the externals of life that those "things" become their identity. When has that been true in your life? How can the competition for honor be harmful to a community of faith?

What happens today when a person bases their self-worth on the opinions of others?

Next, Jesus instructs the guests to seek a place of lower status and thus be "honored" when they are called to a higher place. Remember: true honor is not that which we claim for ourselves but that which is given to us by another, namely God. Our Lord is instructing us in what God find honorable; the humility to put others first. Humility is the remedy that breaks the endless competition for honor. The Christian virtue of humility is not an act of self-degradation or deprecation; Christian humility is based on the truth of who are and who we are not. The very word "humility" comes from the Latin word "humus" meaning "earth". As human beings, we come from the dust of the earth yet we receive life through the Spirit of God who creates us. Who we are, then, is a complete gift of God. Such an honest awareness both prevents us from developing a falsely exalted view of ourselves and acknowledges the great dignity inherent to our nature.

Who is someone you know that manifests such a truly humble life? What are their characteristics?

When have you been honored by someone else in a way you were not seeking and why?
What was that like to have unsolicited honor given to you rather than seeking it for yourself?
What does unhealthy humility look like?

After offering His teaching on how to behave at a dinner, Jesus then moves on to offer the more challenging teaching of who to invite! In doing so, He is no longer addressing actions; now He is addressing relationships. He says, “Stop inviting your friends”. The implication is that enough friends have already been invited; now it is time to invite some others —namely, the ones who need to be included because they live their lives on the margin of society. It’s interesting that in this passage, Jesus uses four different words to describe the various settings in which His teaching applies; reception, lunch, dinner, and banquet (Greek = gamous, aristos, deipnon, doche). By referring to these four different settings, Jesus is including all social events in His command and the Lord is teaching us to open all our life to others and not just one part of our lives. Basically, the inclusion of the marginalized is to be a way of life for a disciple. Each of us knows marginalized people who would love to be included in the events our lives. They may be members of our families, friends, professional associates, neighbors, and even fellow parishioners. They are the ones who may be a little different from the rest — the blind, lame, deaf, and poor. They are also the ones who may not be able to return our kindness and so our generous welcome becomes a truly selfless act of mercy and compassion. Jesus tells us that God honors those who make a place in their lives to care for the marginalized. After all, in the eyes of God we are all blind, lame, and poor. When we care for one another with mercy, compassion and acceptance then, Jesus says, God will care for us in the same way. Sometimes it is our invitation and welcome that gives dignity to the marginalized and restores them to fullness within the community.

Who in your life, for example, family, friends, professional associates, needs to be dignified by your welcome and hospitality?

In what part of your life do you find it easy to practice a welcoming mercy and compassion?

In what part of your life do you find it difficult to practice mercy and compassion?

When do you find yourself doing nice things for other people because you are hoping they will reciprocate your kindness?

When have you invited a truly marginalized person into your life as an equal and what was that experience like?

All of the above reflection has been applied to the experience of our personal lives. However, we should not miss that Jesus offers His teaching the midst of a “Meal” with the Lord. Thus, everything on which we just reflected could also be applied to our Church community as well. The celebration of the Mass is not meant to be a celebration for the privileged few but an experience of God’s mercy and welcome that heals and restores human dignity to the wounded and marginalized in our midst.

As members of a parish, how can we be tempted to focus on externals?

When can we seek honor for ourselves rather than giving honor to those who need it?

What does the challenge of humility mean for our parish?

Who are the marginalized you need to welcome into our community (or your pew)?

What is the ministry of mercy, compassion and acceptance Jesus wants us to undertake in your community?

Why do you think Jesus was so concerned that Christians not participate in the competition for honor?

Let us pray with St. Thérèse de Lisieux, “And yet, dear Lord, Thou knowest my weakness. Each morning I resolve to be humble, and in the evening I recognize that I have often been guilty of pride. The sight of these faults tempts me to discouragement; yet I know that discouragement is itself but a form of pride. I

wish, therefore, O my God, to build all my trust upon Thee. As Thou canst do all things, deign to implant in my soul this virtue which I desire, and to obtain it from Thy Infinite Mercy, I will often say to Thee:
"Jesus, Meek and Humble of Heart, make my heart like unto Thine."