

## **TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

*Gospel: Luke 14:1, 7-14*

On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely. When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable.

“When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

### **REFLECTION 1:**

### **EMBRACING HUMILITY**

In Palestine at the time of Jesus, a meal to which others were invited was an important form of communication. Just as the medium used for communication in speech is language, so the medium at the festival meal in ancient times was the food and drink chosen and just as important, the setting. The quality of the food and drink, the preparation and the seating arrangements for the guests all said something about the host's assessment of those invited. Places of greatest honour were those to the right and left of the host. The further away a guest was seated bore evidence to all of his/her depreciated value in the eyes of the host.

In today's Gospel (Luke 14: 1, 7-14) the context of Jesus' instruction is a Sabbath meal celebrated in the home of a Pharisee. Jesus was a careful observer as well as being himself an object of observation. The Pharisees usually expected to be seated in places of honour and because of their scrupulous observation of the Sabbath their wishes were usually fulfilled. After witnessing their jockeying around for the coveted seats, Jesus began to teach. His words about seeking the lowest place are an echo of the Old Testament proverb: 'Do not give yourselves airs, by putting yourselves among the great' (Proverbs 25:6). It was a warning to those who pushed themselves too brashly that they could be embarrassingly humiliated. It was more preferable in a social context that unpretentious behaviour should invite admiration from others. Jesus was simply saying that more important than our social status in the sight of others, is our good standing in the eyes of God. Jesus is recommending to us the virtue of humility – those who assert their own importance in the sight of others, have already been rewarded with the fleeting and dubious dignity that self-assertion brings. The truthful person on the other hand recognizes the greatness of God as well as his/her lowliness and need. Such a person will share the honour of union with the Lord at the banquet that never ends.

Jesus taught a further lesson about the kingdom. The Pharisee, into whose house Jesus had been invited, had also invited others like himself, friends, relatives, neighbours and those with wealth, whose presence

would reflect well on the host and household. They in turn would be expected to return the favour on a quid pro quo basis. In the light of this social give and take, Jesus' advice must have seemed shocking and even ridiculous. To invite the beggar, the crippled and the blind and the lame would be to entertain those from whom one could not expect recompense or reciprocation and would have reflected badly and brought shame on the host. Such folk, in the eyes of the Pharisees, would be regarded as unclean and sinners. Jesus is challenging all of us to recognise the reversal of human values as integral to the good news of the Gospel. From the beginning of his ministry he had shown God's special love for the poor, the lame, and the blind. Those whom the world rejected would be the special guests at the banquet in the kingdom. He is challenging us, as Pope Francis has done, to show the same altruistic love for the homeless, the downcasts and the outcasts, as we would have liked to exchange with the wealthy and well-placed members of society. In so doing we would be living the good news and God himself would eternally reward our humility.

## **REFLECTION 2:**

## **THE PROPER BALANCE**

People in biblical times used food and drink both as nourishment and as ways of saying something to each other. A meal to which others were invited was an important form of communication with significant social messages exchanged between the host and those who were invited, as well as those who might have expected to be invited but were not. Also those who declined the invitation. The quality of food and drink chosen, their method of preparation, kind of service as well as the sitting or reclining arrangements, all said something about the host's assessment of those invited. The places of greatest honour were those to the left and right of the host. The further away a guest was placed bore evidence to all of his or her depreciated value in the eyes of the host.

Luke portrays Jesus at table as teacher and nourisher of the people (Lc. 14:7-14). In today's Gospel Jesus's instruction unfolds on the occasion of a Sabbath meal, celebrated in the home of one of the Pharisees. Jesus was critically observed and Jesus himself a careful observer. The meal was prepared the day before, the day of preparation, so as to keep the Sabbath law as a day of rest. After the temple or synagogue service which usually took place at noon, guests would gather in the host's home to share the dinner. Because of their scrupulous observance of the Torah (Law), Pharisees usually expected to be seated in a place of honour. After witnessing their jockeying around for the coveted seats, Jesus began to teach. His words about seeking the lowest place seems to be an echo of the Old Testament proverb: "In the presence of the King do not give yourselves airs and so be humiliated in the sight of the assembly" (Prov. 25:26). It was a warning that embarrassment would follow the person who pushed forward too brashly. It would be more preferable to win praise and honour by one's weak behaviour. Jesus was saying that it was much more important that their social status in the eyes of others would be a reflection of their good standing in the sight of God. The truthful person, Jesus would say, recognises the greatness of God as well as his or her loneliness and need. This humble estate would win union with the lord at the banquet that never ends.

All those invited by the hosts were expected to return the favour on a quid-pro-quo basis. In the light of this give and take, Jesus' advice must have seemed shocking - to invite the beggars, crippled, blind and lame would be to entertain those from whom one could expect no return. In those days, people with disabilities were regarded as unclean, erroneously associated with sin and would have brought shame on the host.

Jesus invites us to a reversal of accepted human values in favour of the etiquette of the good news of the kingdom - God's special love for the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. Those whom the world rejected would be the special guests at the banquet of the kingdom of God. The downcast and the downtrodden should have equal status to the wealthy and well-placed members in society. As the

first reading reminds us “The proud and the pompous may impress and dazzle, but the humble person is loved and befriended”.