

GOSPEL

LUKE 14:1, 7-14

On a sabbath day Jesus had gone for a meal to the house of one of the leading Pharisees; and they watched him closely. He then told the guests a parable, because he had noticed how they picked the places of honour. He said this, 'When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take your seat in the place of honour. A more distinguished person than you may have been invited, and the person who invited you both may come and say, "Give up your place to this man." And then, to your embarrassment, you would have to go and take the lowest place. No; when you are a guest, make your way to the lowest place and sit there, so that, when your host comes, he may say, "My friend, move up higher." In that way, everyone with you at the table will see you honoured. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the man who humbles himself will be exalted.'

Then he said to his host, 'When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not ask your friends, brothers, relations or rich neighbours, for fear they repay your courtesy by inviting you in return. No; when you have a party, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; that they cannot pay you back means that you are fortunate, because repayment will be made to you when the virtuous rise again.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

In the scene from today's Gospel passage, Jesus, in the home of one of the chief Pharisees, observes that the guests at lunch rush to choose the first place. It is a scene that we have seen so often: seeking the best place even "with our elbows". Observing this scene, Jesus shares two short parables, and with them two instructions: one concerning the place, and the other concerning the reward.

The first analogy is set at a wedding banquet. Jesus says: "When you are invited by any one to a marriage feast, do not sit down in a place of honour, lest a more eminent man than you be invited by him; and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give place to this man', and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place". With this recommendation,

Jesus does not intend to give rules of social behaviour, but rather a lesson on the value of humility. History teaches that pride, careerism, vanity and ostentation are the causes of many evils. And Jesus helps us to understand the necessity of choosing the last place, that is, of seeking to be small and hidden: humility. When we place ourselves before God in this dimension of humility, God exalts us, he stoops down to us so as to lift us up to himself; "For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted".

Jesus' words emphasize completely different and opposing attitudes: the attitude of those who choose their own place and the attitude of those who allow God to assign it and await a reward from Him. Let us not forget this: God pays much more than men do! He gives us a much greater place than that which men give us! The place that God gives us is close to his heart and his reward is eternal life. "You will be blessed", Jesus says, "you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just".

This is what is described in the second parable, in which Jesus points out the attitude of selflessness that ought to characterize hospitality, and he says: "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you". This means choosing gratuitousness rather than self-seeking and calculating to obtain a reward, seeking interest and trying to increase your wealth. Indeed, the poor, the simple, those who 'don't count', can never reciprocate an invitation to a meal. In this way Jesus shows his preference for the poor and the excluded, who are the privileged in the Kingdom of God, and he launches the fundamental message of the Gospel which is to serve others out of love for God. Today, Jesus gives voice to those who are voiceless, and to each one of us he addresses an urgent appeal to open our hearts and to make our own the sufferings and anxieties of the poor, the hungry, the marginalized, the refugees, those who are defeated by life, those who are rejected by society and by the arrogance of the strong. And those who are discarded make up the vast majority of the population.

At this time, I think with gratitude of the soup kitchens where many volunteers offer their services, giving food to people who are alone, in need, unemployed or homeless. These soup kitchens and other works of mercy — such as visiting the sick and the imprisoned — are a training ground for charity that spreads the culture of gratuity, as those who work in these places are motivated by God's love and enlightened by the wisdom of the Gospel. In this way serving others becomes a testimony of love, which makes the love of Christ visible and credible.

Let us ask the Virgin Mary, who was humble throughout her whole life, to lead us every day along the way of humility, and to render us capable of free gestures of welcome and solidarity with those who are marginalized, so as to become worthy of the divine reward.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In what areas of your life do you need to be wary of pride?
2. How might you look to build the virtue of humility more deeply into your life?
3. Who are the poor (who can't pay you back), but who God has placed into your life, enabling you to honour them?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.