

## 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

This Sunday's Gospel passage shows us Jesus participating in a feast in the house of one of the head Pharisees. Jesus watches and observes how the guests run, make haste to get the best seats. It is rather common behaviour in our time too, and not only when we are invited to lunch: one frequently seeks a place of honour in order to assert a presumed superiority over others. In reality this race to the forefront harms both civil and ecclesial communities because it destroys fraternity. We all know these people: social climbers who always clamber upwards in order

to move up, up.... They harm fraternity, they damage fraternity. Faced with this scene, Jesus recounts two short parables.

The first parable is addressed to one who is invited to a feast and Jesus exhorts him not to "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, 'Please, move back, give place to this man'". An embarrassment! And "then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place". Jesus instead teaches us to behave in the opposite way: "when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher'". Thus, we should not seek the attention and regard of others on our own initiative but, if anything, let others offer them to us. Jesus always shows us the way of humility — we must learn the way of humility! — because it is the most authentic way, which also allows one to enjoy authentic relationships. True humility, not false humility, the kind they call in Piedmont, *mugna quacia*. No, not that kind. True humility.

In the second parable, Jesus addresses the one who invites and, referring to the method of selecting guests, says to him: "when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you". Here too, Jesus goes completely against the tide, manifesting as always, the logic of God the Father. And he also adds the key by which to interpret this discourse of his. And what is the key? A promise: if you do this, you "will be repaid at the resurrection of the just". This means that those who behave in this way will receive divine compensation, far superior to human repayment: I do this favour for you expecting you to do one for me. No, this is not Christian. Humble generosity is Christian. Indeed, human repayment usually distorts relationships, making them "commercial" by bringing personal interest into a relationship that should be generous and free. Instead, Jesus encourages selfless generosity,

to pave our way toward a much greater joy, the joy of partaking in the very love of God who awaits us, all of us, at the heavenly banquet.

May the Virgin Mary, "humble beyond all creatures and more exalted" (Dante, *Paradiso*, xxxiii, 2), help us to recognize ourselves as we are, that is, small; and to give joyfully, without repayment.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- In what areas of your life do you need to be wary of pride?
- How might you look to build the virtue of humility more deeply into your life?
- 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.