

22nd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR C

(Sir 3:17-18, 20, 28-29; Heb 12:18-19, 22-24a; Lk 14:1, 7-14)

Excerpts of Pope Francis– Angelus - 28 August 2016 & 2019

by Father Charles Fillion

28 August 2022

Brothers and sisters, today, Jesus is in the home of one of the chief Pharisees. The Gospel says that they “were watching him closely”. Well Jesus also observed the guests and “noticed how” they chose the places of honour. It is a scene that we have seen so often: seeking the best place even “with our elbows” in order to assert a presumed superiority over others. 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 someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host. The host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place’... So, when you are invited, go and sit down at 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, vanity and showing off are the causes of many evils. In reality this race to the forefront harms both civil and church communities because it destroys fraternity. 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 bends 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” (v. 11).

Today, we live in a world where prestige, ambition, and even fame abounds, especially in sports. 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 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, “for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (v. 14).

This is what is described in the second parable, in which Jesus points out the attitude of self-sacrifice 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” (vv. 13-14). I do this favour for you expecting you to do one for me. No, this is not Christian. It is a matter of choosing freely 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 give in return an invitation to a meal.

Humble generosity is Christian. Here too, Jesus goes completely against the tide, manifesting as always, the logic of God the Father. 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. 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 rejected by society. 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 are a training ground for charity that spreads the culture of generosity, 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.