

## Twenty-second Sunday Ordinary Time

Dinner time can be a special time for families. After a full day of work, or school, or whatever activities that one may have had, it's nice for the family to get together and share a meal. I realize that not every family does this, or has the opportunity to do it. But it is nice when it can happen. Getting together for dinner was really important to my parents when my siblings and I were children. My parents insisted that the family all sit down at the dinner table together and share the evening meal. This brought about a sense of bonding and unity, that we were one as a family unit. At dinner, we had a chance to discuss what we had done that day, and perhaps to tell a joke or two. We all had our unofficially assigned seats too. For every dinner, as long as I can remember, we always sat in the same place. Nobody dared to sit in another's place. It just didn't happen.

However, whenever there were guests invited to the dinner, that might change. We realized that you had to treat your guests with respect, and that might mean giving up your favorite place at the dinner table. We didn't mind giving up our spot, especially when Dad said, "You're sitting over here tonight." We just moved over to where we were told to go.

In our Gospel reading today we hear about a dinner that was held at the house of one of the leading Pharisees (Lk 14:1, 7-14). Things must have been different during the time of Jesus because the people were choosing the place that they wanted to sit for dinner. In our own time whenever we are invited to somebody's house for dinner we usually ask, "Where would you like me to sit?" But in this Gospel reading, it sounds like the people were vying for the best places to sit. I wonder how many elbows were thrown to make sure that somebody got the best place to sit. There may have also been a few short disagreements as two or three people may have wanted the same place.

As we heard in our Gospel reading Jesus noticed the people were vying for the places of honor at the table, which is why He gave this parable. *Don't seek to get a place of honor for yourself.* In this parable it is also possible to interpret Jesus as meaning: it's human nature to want to raise ourselves up, or to better our position, e.g. trying to get the best place to sit. This is done on our own effort though, whether or not we deserve it. We are the ones that raise ourselves up. This shows a lack of humility and lack of concern for others. It is pride that drives us to seek a place of honor, and usually this is at the expense of someone else.

This is a lesson on learning and practicing humility. Seek the lowest place: for one reason, you may be in the right place to begin with. And then, no one can make you go lower, because you are already there. It takes humility to realize our place in the order of things. Another reason for seeking the lowest place is that God may want us to be there for the sake of others. God may want to place others around us so that they may be affected in a positive way by us. God does this by placing certain people in places where that particular person may be the light of Christ for others. Have you ever been at a dinner function and sat at a table with people that you did not know? When you strike up a conversation with your tablemates you may find that you have things in common; or that you may be able to answer an important question or concern that someone may have. This is not coincidence. This most likely is the work of God.

And of course, we should always look forward to what we can learn about the end of time at that heavenly banquet. God will be the One who assigns us a place in heaven, God willing all of us make it there. God will assign us to a lower or higher place, depending on His own criteria. It will take humility to enter into the Kingdom of God, and hopefully we will respond with grateful hearts to wherever God assigns us. As we heard in the second reading, "you have approached Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and countless angels in festal gathering, and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven, and God the judge of all, and the spirits of the just made perfect, and Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant." (Heb 12:18-19, 22-24a)

God draws us forward to that image that we just heard about. He leads us on to its fulfillment. God wants us to join Him at the heavenly banquet at the end of time. Is this something that we can do on our own? No, it takes humility to follow God's lead, and to allow His grace to work within us. Being Christ-like, and seeking the lowest place as Jesus did, takes humility. Yet, if we practice humility, and allow it to become a part of who we are, then we are taking the first step toward that heavenly banquet where there will be a place reserved for us. Learn from Jesus, who is meek and humble of heart. Listen to Him so that we may one day be allowed to join Him at the table, where there will be joy that lasts an eternity.