

HOMILY SUNDAY 22 – C

“Be Humble of Heart”

(Sirach 3:17-20, 28-29; Psalm 68; Heb 12:18-19, 22-24a; Luke 14:1, 7-14)

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A happy loving couple celebrating their 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary was asked their secret. The husband replied that when they got married, they agreed that he would make the major decision, she the minor ones, and that in their 60 years of marriage, they never had to make a major decision!

The readings today give us a simple message: Be humble of heart

In the first reading, God reveals his secrets to the humble – a special knowledge that is experience. The psalm reminds us that God makes a home for the poor; they have cause to rejoice and exult. And of course the gospel insists that the proud will be humbled, and the humble will be exalted.

What God wants is a humble spirit and a contrite heart, a repentant heart; one who is able to face the truth about one's self and to seek to make amends for any wrongs done. Spiritual writer Meister Eckhart put it this way: “To get at the core of God at his greatest, one must first get at the core of one's self at our least.”

False pride covers a felt insecurity, that one is not good enough, and an unwillingness to face that painful reality, so a choice is made to pretend, to wear masks, to try to fool one's self and others, to run from one's own reality into illusion and deception.

Humility comes from humus and human; to be real; to accept one's self as one really is, to let go of any pretense and deception, to have the courage to face reality, accept reality, and deal with reality. A humble person is a healthy person psychologically.

In the gospel for today, Jesus is holding up a mirror so that the guests can see themselves as he sees them, caught in games of hypocrisy and posturing. They are far from the kingdom. What will it take to get through to them? They refuse to answer questions and enter into dialogue. In his commentary on this passage, John O'Shea suggest that perhaps a wild caricature picture of themselves will give them the self-knowledge to be able to see their falseness, laugh at them selves and have some hope of conversion.

The New Interpreter's Bible adds some background information to help us grasp the situation at that time. The poor, crippled, blind and lame were explicitly forbidden to serve as priests and were barred from entry into the Qumran community. The contrast between such restrictions and the spirit of Jesus' teachings could hardly be more striking. The kingdom of God will bring about a revolutionary reversal of values. The very standards and practices of discrimination will be thrown out. The outcasts will be accepted as equals. Those who live by kingdom values and standards now will not only bear witness to the kingdom but will also be rewarded in the “resurrection of the

righteous.” Righteousness, not social position or the esteem of others, should be our goal. God does not look on the glitter of our guest list. Instead, God looks to see that we have practiced the generosity and inclusiveness of the kingdom in our daily social relationships. One standard offers the reward of social position, the other the reward of God’s favour. The standards of Jesus and the Pharisees were different. For Jesus, meals were a time of celebration and an inclusive fellowship that foreshadowed the inclusiveness of God’s kingdom.

Corbin Eddy adds these thoughts. To eat is to be in communion with all that is. Consciousness of what we are doing when we sit down together at a meal encourages humility, solidarity and openness to those with whom we eat, and with the whole of creation. Any distinction of class, or consideration of formalities and rules of etiquette, is clearly of secondary importance in this table spirituality. Jesus made this table spirituality a priority in his teaching and in his whole way of being in the world. Table fellowship was also a time for sharing of wisdom. For Jesus, questions that emerged were: How big is your table? How round? With whom do you relate? Is there room at your table for the poor? For Jesus, real humility is found in living the meal: living in respect, collaboration and solidarity with all people, with all living things, with all the earth. Real humility is found in being open and ready to share with and to learn from all people, especially those who seem least likely to have something to teach us.

False pride is truly deadly. I remember visiting a man in the hospital who was suffering from alcohol poisoning. His last words to me as I parted with the hope of seeing him again were, “Don’t tell anyone I am here.” I felt so sad – here he was, alone, suffering, and still too proud to reach out for help. He died two weeks later – never having understood the meaning of his life.

Water is a good example of humility, as it that always seeks the lowest place, but is raised up to become clouds in the heavens. Jesus himself, the Creator, always chose the least and the poorest, to exalt them. At the Marian Center in Edmonton there is a wall mural that depicts Jesus in a food line, barely distinguishable from the other homeless people. That is humility.

The Eucharist that we now celebrate is truly a humble meal of faith and forgiveness. It empowers us to go out, to be humble bearers of Good News

So, be humble of heart, and you will be exalted