

Homily for September 2, 2001  
22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle C

By Father Charles Bowes

Sirach 3:17, 20, 28-29  
Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24a  
Luke 14:1, 7-14

## *In God's eyes we all are great.*

Jesus sure proved to be a difficult party guest. Certainly he was no stranger to festive get-togethers: the wedding feast at Cana, the parables of the great banquet and the prodigal son – and he obviously understood good wine.

Today's gospel, Luke 14, takes place at a dinner banquet to which Jesus has been invited – presumably a banquet that was quite exclusive. And Jesus manages to insult both the host and the guests. ...Or at least to teach them and us a lesson.

First, as for the guests, when he notices that they are scrambling to take their higher place at the table, he chides them for their imprudence. Teaches them a lesson in humility. He is not just giving advice about where to seat oneself at table. Rather, the parable is an attempt to get the listeners to realize that before God they are nothing. In any event, it certainly seemed inappropriate to do that teaching on such an occasion.

Secondly, to compound matters, Jesus admonishes the host who invited him. He criticizes the exclusive nature of the host's invitation. The host invited only those whom he thought could somehow repay him. Jesus tells the Pharisee instead that he should invite

those who cannot repay him – especially the cripple, the lame and the blind. Of course, it would be pressing Jesus' words too far to conclude that we should never invite friends and relatives. Such invitations could also win God's approval. The motive is the thing...the motive both of the guest and of the host – why sit here? What makes one invite *these* people?

It's about honor isn't it? This energy of invitation and of where to sit. What does it mean for a Christian both to seek honor and seek repayment for what he or she does?

We are certainly no strangers to honor in our culture. We experience the search for and the reception of honors at an early age. Our schools – elementary, high school, or even college – honor students and faculty in any number of ways. A person can be an “honor” student, “student of the month,” the athlete of the week, the one most improved for the year, the one most cooperative, and even the one who had perfect attendance. A casual look at the television will notice countless award shows on television: sports, music, television, music videos, and films. There's even a show that ranks the top ten natural disasters!

The Greek philosopher Aristotle thought, however, that honor was a rather superficial thing. Honor depended more on the one conferring it than on the

one receiving it. It was after all aimed at persons noted for their goodness. But since goodness is not something easily taken away, those who were genuinely good did not need the honor bestowed by others anyway.

Aristotle concluded that those bestowing honor were actually more interested in proving their own goodness than that of those they honored. So what is truly at stake in the seeking of honor was, in Aristotle's mind, the seeking of something entirely different: goodness in oneself. If I could recognize goodness in another, then somehow, by osmosis, I must be pretty good too.

However, in our gospel, Luke 14, Jesus is implying that honor is indeed something that only another can bestow. We cannot honor ourselves by sitting at the highest place; another must give it. But what is different here is that Jesus is presuming that anyone could be called to the place of honor. The Jewish tradition in which Jesus is teaching had long recognized that, since each person shares uniquely in the covenant relation with God, each can be honored in their love and wisdom.

How do we understand honor and rewards in our lives? Well, on one hand, we tend to think that we ought not – and in fact do not – usually seek repayment for most of what we do. Think of the small things we do for neighbors, friends, co-workers. While we do them, it seems like repayment for these actions is often farthest from our minds. Do parents want repayment for all the diapers they changed through the years? For the times we've helped our neighbors rake their leaves? For the times we help a co-worker finish a project? And yet, how many of us would do what we do if we were to receive little or no recompense for it? How many of us can sustain a friendship that is never reciprocated? And how many parents could be good parents if they knew that their children would never in

the future acknowledge in any way their efforts as parents? How many of us would work overtime at our jobs regularly for no extra pay?

I guess it comes down to a choice we each can make as to how we both go about our lives in terms of honor and humility. Frederick Collins writes: "Always remember there are two types of people in this world. Those who come into a room and say, 'Well, here I am!' and those who come in and say, 'Ah, there you are!'"

**In God's eyes we all are great.**