

**Homily for August 29, 2004**  
**22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**By Father Charles Bowes**  
**Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29**  
**Psalm 6-8:4-7, 10-11**  
**Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24**  
**Luke 14:1, 7-14**

## *We, like Jesus, choose to companion what is most in need in us and in others.*

Today's gospel contradicts itself. Twice advice is given, and the two pieces of advice contradict each other. It is as if Jesus says: "Go," and at the same time, "Don't go." It is as if Jesus says, "Do this," and at the same time, "Don't do this."

Let's start with the second saying. He recommends: "If you prepare a feast, don't invite all kinds of guests who can and will repay you. Don't calculate that way, but invite those who will not be able to do anything in return. Invite disinterestedly, and your feast will be grand. If you invite only those who are going to re-invite you, then they will say to one another, 'He invited us only because he wants something in return,' and your feast will be no feast at all. Be wise, don't calculate, be generous, and all will go well."

In his first piece of advice, it seems that Jesus suggests calculation. He says: "If you want to be honored, don't take too high a place at the table, because you will be humiliated when the host comes in. Don't even take the place that is yours, because you will not be honored, either. Think, calculate, be clever, take too low a place, and when the host comes in, he

will walk up to you in front of all of them, and he will say: 'Oh, don't sit there, come higher up.' And all the guests will say: 'Look at him, what a noble man, and so humble.'" There must have been something behind all of this. And there is.

When we invite those who cannot repay us, our invitations are according to the lines of the Father's heavenly banquet. Our invitation runs according to the lines of Jesus' Kingdom. Isn't that also true when we sit down with the poor and the smallest, with the miserable and the wretched, when we take their place, their stand, and their position? Isn't that what Jesus did? Isn't that true when we befriend and companion those small and weak dimensions of our own soul? Aren't we acting as God does when we embrace those dimensions of our heart that are tawdry and poor? Isn't that also what it means to invite the lowly and the outcast to our table – to invite that part of us that embarrasses and shames?

"Humble yourself the more, the greater you are..." says our first reading from the book of Sirach, chapter three. Carry out our business at home and at work gently, advises Sirach. That is to say, taking into account the weak, the poor, the small – listening to and respecting our own littleness too. We will be loved the

better for it, because then the whole world would change to the extent that all the aid and the handouts would no longer be needed.

And isn't this what so many of us do anyway? We care for family members and friends and neighbors, even though we may be hard on ourselves and rather critical and questioning of our motives? We offer our time and whatever resources we can to soup kitchens and clothing drives; we join walks and runs in support of worthy causes. We are just ordinary people attentive to others in ordinary ways that are really extraordinary. In such situations, we do not claim places of honor; we do not insist on special recognition. Rather, we genuinely conduct our affairs in humility or try to. That is the Spirit of the risen Lord in whose name we pray and praise the Father.

A famous storyteller told of a spiritual master who overheard a disciple boasting to a visitor, "I have been honored because the Master chose me to be his disciple and sent a hundred others away."

The master took him aside and said, "If you were chosen over the others, it is only because you have a greater need than they do."

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