

## 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday: A Call to be humble and hospitable to all

For Jesus, banquets were not merely time of enjoying food & drink, but a place to learn the depth of spiritual truths. In today's gospel, we learn about Jesus' invitation to humility. He says: "*When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed.*"

Jesus is not simply teaching us good table manners. He is giving us a vision of the **Kingdom of God** — a place where the forgotten are remembered, the voiceless are heard, and the poor are welcomed with dignity. It is a call to **radical hospitality**, especially towards those who cannot repay us.

Jesus is not speaking about how to score free seat upgrades. Rather it is a wise pattern for the whole life. It is a call to live free from the anxiety of constantly grasping for status and recognition.

Our society tells us that being first, being the best is all important. But we know, this is not in the true spirit of the gospel. There is only one bad thing about being right, or first or best, and that one thing is, *doing something just to be right or just to be the best or just to be the first.*

Scripture would invite us: "my child, conduct your affairs with humility and you will be loved more, than a gift giver". We are called to be gentle and are called to endure. We are called to bring peace to conflict. "Learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart". R/Ps

B&S, we are passing one of the darkest moments of our local church. Our hearts are heavy, because the unthinkable has happened in our neighborhood -at Annunciation Church. The shooting and killing of

innocent children at Holy Mass - which is the very heart of our faith- where Christ gives us his Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist. Children of God killed while at prayer, and many wounded. The dreams and hopes of families are shattered. Our parish communities and our whole archdiocese are in shock and grief.

As we carry the anguish, there are many unanswered questions. We may reasonably ask: why God permit this to happen? No one has enough explanation to give. We can show only compassion and empathy, to feel one with those directly affected. To be close to them in prayer and support.

We can join hearts and hands with the Annunciation community, with the families of Fletcher and Harper, the children killed, with the injured children and parishioners, and with all those who are suffering. In this moment of grief, we believe it is important to stand together and provide help as one. Know that you have the opportunity to help by making a donation to the “*Annunciation Hope and Healing Fund*” set up by the CCF.

B&S, Let us commend to God the souls of those innocent children who were killed. Let us pray for the wounded and their families, for their healing and recovery. Let us pray for one another, that we may have the courage to be true disciples, members of the same Body of Christ, feeling one with them, reflecting the heart of Christ himself.  
Amen

tells us about the rush and push of the invited guests to occupy the first places at wedding banquet table. Jesus make it an occasion to teach the great lesson of humility, mother of all virtues; telling them to choose the lower places so that they may be honored, instead of being humiliated.

B&S, There is a lot of conflict in this world. I don't just mean war, terrorism or violence. I mean the daily conflicts we are part of, at work, school, in our families and even in this Church. Small arguments, little disagreements, frustrations that other people don't quite see the world as we see it. Tiny fights we need to win each day to succeed in our work, and living our faith.

There is something about 'being human' that drives us to succeed, to want to achieve things. For some people they target greatness, for others, maybe the ambition is smaller, getting the kids to eat breakfast and get to school on time is challenge enough. Ambition, drive, success and winning are the themes of today. Today's teaching from Christ seems just contradictory, "If anyone

wants to be first, they must make themselves last of all." The message doesn't fit with the way, we see the world function.

The seeds of the peace –making, will bear fruit in holiness. Jesus tells us to occupy the lowest place, to be the servant of all. It's in our nature to put ourselves first. Christ tells us not to, he tells us to put others first. Put others first, to serve them means, you are serving the Lord himself.

There is a huge difference between 'doing your best' and 'being best'. Being the best student, the best parent, the best doctor, the best anything you can be, *is good*, it's holy and it will bear fruit. Being better than anyone else is pointless and will only lead to conflict. We need to use our skills for others, welcome their needs, their vulnerabilities. Help them as we would help a child. Welcome them with open arms, and we will be welcoming Christ.

B&S, Following our Lord is not easy. He never promised, it would be. Selflessness is not in our nature, pride and greed are. If you are to be a follower of Christ, you need to put your human nature last, to enable you to put your spiritual nature first. Work hard, but always for others, strive to do your best, but resist the urge, just to be the first and the best, for if you are the best, thank God that you are able to serve so well.

This week I invite you to reflect on the today's teaching. It's a hard one, a call to be humble. It's one we will all find difficult, and without prayer and a relationship with a loving God we may find it impossible. But we have a loving God, one who is humble and selfless, who died for us, who forgives us, and is ready to help us if

we just ask in prayer for help. Kindly pray about conflicts in your life, pray for help in bringing peace, pray that you maybe be a seed of the peacemakers and bring all, a harvest of holiness.

*(A little girl became restless during Sunday Mass, as the preacher's sermon dragged on and on. Finally, she leaned over to her mother and whispered, "Mommy, if we give him the money now, will he let us go?")*

- Just as in last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus asks his apostles a question. This time they do not answer, because they are ashamed to. Their reasoning is probably something like this. Jews are greater than Gentiles. The disciples are greater than the Jews in general. The Twelve are greater than the rest of the disciples. Therefore, one of the Twelve must be the greatest among this select group.

- But one reason they are silent is that the Lord's greatness is so out of proportion to whatever favor or merit they can claim.
- In addition, they know Jesus well enough to intuit that there is something wrong about exercising greatness and power as the world does.
- Jesus' response is as surprising and profound as his revelation in last week's Gospel about each one of us having a cross and that cross being our way to salvation.
  - "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all." The example he provides to illustrate what he means is receiving a child, the epitome of unimportance. Receiving a child in Christ's name is the way to receive Christ, and thus the Father. Stooping down to serve the lowliest is the way to reach the heights of Christ and God the Father.
  - *If anyone wishes.* This is an ambition Our Lord approves of.

#### Doctrine: The virtue of service and the vice of envy

- As the verse before the Gospel expressed, "God has called us through the Gospel to possess the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."
- Because we share in the Kingship of Christ, we are all kings or princes, queens or princesses.
- However, Christ the King's way of ruling is service: "drawing all men to himself by giving his life as a ransom" (CCC 786).
- Thus, "to reign is to serve him." We exercise our royal rule by serving Christ. This is especially true in the case of serving anyone in need, "in whom the Church recognizes the image of her poor and suffering founder." (CCC 786)
- This service includes our obedience to the moral law. As Pope St. Leo the Great put it, "What, indeed, is as royal for a soul as to govern the body in obedience to God?" (Quoted in CCC 786)
- An enemy of the spirit of royal service is the vice of envy. Envy, "a capital sin," is "sadness at the sight of another's goods and the immoderate desire to acquire them for oneself, even unjustly. When it wishes grave harm to a neighbor it is a mortal sin." (CCC 2539)
- Augustine sees envy as the origin of many other evils: "hatred, detraction, calumny, joy caused by the misfortune of a neighbor, and displeasure caused by his prosperity." (CCC 2539) Today's readings are chock full of examples of these bitter fruits.

#### Practical application: Humble and admiring nobility

- Every human being knows deep down—even if not consciously—that he or she is very important.

- As Christians, we should call to mind often that we are children of God and far more important than any human royalty in any time or place.
- At the same time, our hearts are wounded by original sin, from our experiences, and from our personal sins. In addition, other people often do not recognize our importance.
- As Fr. Robert Spitzer points out in his insightful work on the four levels of happiness, when our own importance is not recognized by others, we can become sad, depressed, angry, or contemptuous.
- He also points out two practical ways to respond to these promptings of envy or misguided self-criticism.
  - When we see something another has and we don't, we can respond with humility rather than humiliation. Humility sees the truth. The other really has received some gift we have not. For example, this other person excels over me because God has given him three times more energy than me.
  - A second good response is admiration at the good the other possesses. Why admiration? It can encourage us to do more or better. For example, the one who has excelled over me has so much more energy. So, I want to cultivate the energy God has given me and even find ways to increase it so I can do better.