

One-page synopsis of OT XXII [C] (Aug 28) Homily Lk 14:1, 7-14

Introduction: The common theme of today's readings is the need for true humility which leads to a generous blessed sharing with the needy. The readings also warn us against all forms of pride and self-glorification. They present humility not only as a virtue but also as a means of opening our hearts, our minds and our hands to the poor, the needy, the disadvantaged and the marginalized people in our society – a personal responsibility for every authentic Christian.

Scripture lessons: The first reading, taken from the book of Sirach, reminds us that if we are humble, we will find favor with God, and others will love us. The second reading, taken from Hebrews, gives another reason for us to be humble. Jesus was humble, so his followers are expected to be humble, trying to imitate his humility. Paul reminds us that Jesus was lowly, particularly in his suffering and death for our salvation (Heb 2:5-18), so we should be like him in order to be exalted with him at the resurrection of the righteous. Paul also seems to imply that we need to follow Christ's example of humility in our relationships with the less fortunate members of our society. In today's Gospel, Jesus explains the practical benefits of humility, connecting it with the common wisdom about dining etiquette. Jesus advises the guests to go to the lowest place instead of seeking places of honor, so that the host may give them the place they really deserve. Jesus' words concerning the seating of guests at a wedding banquet should prompt us to honor those whom others ignore, because if we are generous and just in our dealings with those in need, we can be confident of the Lord's blessings.

Life Message: We need to practice humility in personal and social life: Humility is based on the psychological awareness that everything I have is a gift from God and, therefore, I have no reason to elevate myself above others. On the contrary, I must use these God-given gifts to help others. True humility requires us neither to overestimate nor to underestimate our worth. We must admit the truths that we are sinners, that we do not know everything and that we do not always act

properly. Nevertheless, we must also recognize that we are made in the image and likeness of God, and that we are called to help build the kingdom of God with our God-given gifts. We are of value, not because of those gifts, but because we are loved by God as His children, redeemed by the precious blood of His son Jesus. The quality of humility that Jesus is talking about also has a sociological dimension. For Jesus is inviting us to associate with the so-called "lower classes" of the society -- even the outcasts. Jesus invites us to change our social patterns in such a way that we connect with and serve the homeless, the handicapped, the elderly, and the impoverished -- the "street people" of the world with *agápe* love. (L/16)

OT XXII [C] (Aug 28): [Sir 3:17-18, 20, 28-29](#); Heb 12:18-19, 22-24a; [Lk 14:1, 7-14](#)

Anecdote: 1) [Cardinal Léger's option for the poor](#): Most Rev. Paul-Émile Léger served as [Archbishop of Montreal](#) from 1950 to 1968, and was elevated to the [cardinalate](#) in 1953 by [Pope Pius XII](#). He was one of the most powerful men in Canada and within the Catholic Church. He was a man of deep conviction and humility. Then on April 20, 1968 he resigned his office and leaving his red vestments, crosier, miter, and pallium in his Montreal office, disappeared. Years later, he was found living among the lepers and disabled, outcasts of a small African village. When a Canadian journalist asked him, "Why?" here is what Cardinal Léger had to say: "It will be the great scandal of the history of our century that 600 million people are eating well and living luxuriously and three billion people starve, and every year millions of children are dying of hunger. I am too old to change all that. The only thing I can do which makes sense is to be present. I must simply be in the midst of them. So, just tell people in Canada that you met an old priest. I am a priest who is happy to be old and still a priest and among those who suffer. I am happy to be here and to take them into my heart." (<http://www.rockies.net/~spirit/sermons/a-or09-2-keeping.php> Is that

your calling? Is it mine? Probably not. Today's Gospel says: "Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." (For a short biography of Cardinal Leger (visit:http://www.sulpc.org/evsulpc_leger_en.php) (Barry Robinson)

2) The humble Gandhi: One man who took Jesus seriously was Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi acknowledged that he had been much influenced by the Gospels and touched by the life of Christ. As he once remarked, "I might have become a Christian had it not been for Christians!" Gandhi did not lead the masses by standing like a monarch above them but by identifying with them and sharing in their circumstances. He identified himself with the half-naked rural masses by rejecting his attorney's pants and coat and dressing himself with a loincloth and cotton shawl. While the other high caste Indian politicians were not willing to associate themselves with the untouchables, Gandhi chose to live, eat and march with the untouchables, and he gave them a new dignity and a new name. He honored them by calling them "*harijans*," "the people of God."

3) America's "First Lady of Etiquette," Emily Post, versus Jesus Christ: Luke 14 focuses on etiquette for guests and hosts at dinner parties. I thought I should see what the original "Miss Manners," Emily Post, had to say on that subject. So I did consult the twelfth edition of Emily Post's Etiquette. I learned to kneel, kiss his ring, and address him as "Your Holiness" when having a private audience with the Pope. I learned replies to lunch invitations to the White House must always be handwritten and always returned that same day -- and the answer is always, "Yes." Emily Post was very specific about planning formal dinners. Seating charts were included showing which seats the guests of honor should get. Who's seated next to whom is also important. Emily Post sums it up: "The requisites for a perfect formal dinner ... are ... Guests who are congenial, Servants who are competent, A lovely table

setting -- Food that is perfectly prepared ... A cordial and hospitable host and a charming hostess" (and a good seating chart). And there is another source we can turn to on how to throw a perfect party. The source is Scripture. And the "etiquette expert" is Jesus himself. In today's Gospel, Jesus gives guidance on party protocol while attending a formal dinner. When God is throwing a party, all the "right" people will be there -- that is everyone who responds to (God's) invitation. But seated next to the host (Jesus) in the places of honor are not the dignitaries, the celebrities, the distinguished people of position and prominence, but rather the poor, the hurting, the outcast -- people who have distinguished themselves only by their need.

Introduction: The common theme of today's readings is the need for true humility which leads to a generous blessed sharing with the needy. The readings warn us against all forms of pride and self-glorification. They present humility not only as a virtue but also as a means of opening our hearts, our minds and our hands to the poor, the needy, the disadvantaged and the marginalized of society. For Jesus, the daily human needs of the poor are the *personal* responsibility of every authentic, humble believer. The first reading, taken from the book of Sirach, reminds us that if we are humble we will find favor with God, and others will love us. The second reading, taken from Hebrews, gives another reason for us to be humble. Jesus was humble, so his followers are expected to be humble, trying to imitate his humility. Paul reminds us that Jesus was lowly, particularly in his suffering and death for our salvation (Heb 2:5-18), so we should be like him that we may be exalted with him at the resurrection of the righteous. Paul seems to imply that we have to follow Christ's example of humility in our relationships with the less fortunate members of our society. In today's Gospel, Jesus explains the practical benefits of humility, connecting it with the common wisdom about dining etiquette (see Prov. 25:6-7; Sir. 3:17-20). Jesus advises the guests to go to the lowest place instead of seeking places of honor so that the host may give them the place they deserve. Jesus' words concerning the seating of guests at a wedding banquet should prompt us to honor those whom others ignore, because if we are

generous and just in our dealings with those in need we can be confident of the Lord's blessings. On the other hand, if we act out of pride and selfishness we can be sure that our efforts will come to nothing.

The first reading, (Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29): Today's reading, taken from Sirach, gives a lesson in humility. Sirach is a book of moral instruction and wise sayings written by a devout Jewish sage about 175 years before the time of Jesus. It is part of the Wisdom literature of the Hebrew Scriptures. As a world traveler (34:12-13) and a respected scribe and teacher, Jesus ben Eleazar ben Sirach, presided as the headmaster of an academy for young men (57:23-30). Today's reading represents excerpted portions of two of ben Sirach's short essays, the first on humility (3:17-24), the second on docility, almsgiving and social conduct (3:25-4:10). Like a parent or an elder brother offering wise counsel, the author recommends that his readers find true greatness in living humbly. "*Conduct your affairs in humility,*" ben Sirach writes. "*The more you humble yourselves, the greater you are.*" He instructs us to be honest about ourselves and to become conscious of our limitations, acknowledging our true position before God as creatures and sinners.

The second reading: (Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24): The Letter to the Hebrews was written in the last quarter of first century AD. Although many of the apostolic eye-witnesses to Jesus had died, the expected Second Coming of Jesus had not taken place. So the Hebrew Christians (Judeo-Christians), subjected to hostilities from both Judaism and the Roman Empire, grew lax in their commitment. Hence, the author of Hebrews asks his readers to choose either the ways of the former Covenant, symbolized by the *fire, storm, darkness, trumpet blast and the voice, speaking words* that they begged not to hear, or the ways of the new Covenant, mediated by Jesus and *celebrated by the angels and the assembly of the firstborn*. St. Paul compares and contrasts the picture of God in the Old Testament with that found in the New Testament. Instead of the frightening manifestation of God's glory in the Old Covenant, the New Testament offers the picture of a loving and humble God as revealed by Christ. Paul seems to imply that we need to follow Christ's

example of humility in our relationship with those members of our society less fortunate than we. We are gathered around "*Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and the sprinkled blood that speaks more eloquently than that of Abel.*" Jesus was lowly, particularly in his suffering and death for our salvation (Heb 2:5-18). If we are humble, like Jesus and with him, we will be exalted with Him at the resurrection of the righteous.

Exegesis: Instruction at a party: The reason why Jesus was invited to the dinner party was that he was already a sort of celebrity, noted for curing the sick. People are always drawn toward celebrities. But Jesus was not interested in such fame. Without putting on an air of superiority, he used the occasion to teach a lesson about the Kingdom, presenting humility as the essential condition for God's invitation to His Heavenly banquet. Humility must be expressed in the recognition of one's lowliness before God and one's need for salvation. Based on his observation of a gross breach of social etiquette at that party, Jesus taught those Jewish religious teachers what genuine humility was and what the dangers of pride were. "*Go and take the lowest place,*" Jesus recommends, "*so that when the host comes to you he may say, 'My friend, move up to a higher position.'*" In other words, we are always to situate ourselves in such a manner that the only way we can go is up.

Importance of humility: When God became man, He chose to occupy the lowest possible seat. Paul described in Phil. 2:7-8, the six steps in humility that God took in coming to this earth. "*Jesus emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.*" Humility was Jesus' favorite theme. "*Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted*" (Luke 14:11); "*Whoever humbles himself like a little child is the greatest in the kingdom of God*" (Matthew 18:4); "*Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart*" (Matthew 11:29). Humility is a strange phenomenon. As a rule, when we discover we have it, we lose it. Humility is like a rare flower -- put it on display, and it instantly wilts

and loses its fragrance! St. Augustine said: "Humility is so necessary for Christian perfection that among all the ways to reach perfection, humility is first, humility is second, and humility is third." He added, "Humility makes men angels, and pride makes angels devils." St. Bernard declared, "Pride sends man from the highest elevation to the lowest abyss, but humility raises him from the lowest abyss to the highest elevation."

Humility with a hook: Here is a portion of one of Mother Teresa's exhortations to her novices: "If I try to make myself as small as I can, I'll never become humble. It is humility with a hook. True humility is truth. Humility comes when I stand as tall as I can, and look at all of my strengths, and the reality about me, but put myself alongside Jesus Christ. And it's there, when I humble myself before Him, and realize the truth of who he is, when I accept God's estimate of myself, stop being fooled about myself and impressed with myself, that I begin to learn humility. The higher I am in grace, the lower I should be in my own estimation because I am comparing myself with the Lord God." Thus, humility is an attempt to see ourselves as God sees us. It is also the acknowledgement that our talents come from God who has seen it fit to work through us. Baron Rothschild once, when asked about seating important guests, said, "Those that matter won't mind where they sit, and those who do mind, don't matter."

Lesson in true humility: In today's Gospel story, Jesus gives his host a lesson in humility. "When you hold a banquet, don't invite friends or relatives or wealthy neighbors, in case they may invite you back and you have repayment. Rather invite the poor, the cripples, the lame, and the blind, who are unable to repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." Thomas Carlyle, the British historian, put it succinctly, "Show me the man you honor, and I will know what kind of man you are." The Pharisees were preoccupied with "earning" a high place in heaven. Jesus counsels them to practice what they preach about God's concern for the poor and thereby to gain true merit. In other words, Jesus suggests, "Do something really different! Invite to your

parties the people who have little to bring with them. The blessing, recognition and benefit you are worried about will come, though not through the means you expect.” The freedom that comes with knowing we are loved and sustained by God is a freedom to give generously of our resources, to give the best place to others without concern for ourselves. **Just as Jesus challenges his fellow guests, so he challenges us. He warns us that those who will be saved will not be people like the Pharisees. The deeper message of this parable is that if we exalt ourselves, we are going to face embarrassment before the judgment seat of God, the Host who has invited us to the banquet of life.**

Life Message: 1) We need to practice humility in personal and social life: Humility is grounded in a psychological awareness that everything I have is a gift from God, and, therefore, I have no reason to boast. I must not use these God-given gifts to elevate myself above others. Hence, humility means the proper understanding of our own worth. It requires us neither to overestimate nor to underestimate our worth. The humility that the Gospel urges upon us has nothing to do with a self-deprecation that leaves a person without proper self-esteem. We must simply admit the truth about ourselves: we do not know everything, we do not do everything correctly and we are all imperfect and sinners. Nevertheless, we also recognize that we are made in the image and likeness of God and that we are called to help build the kingdom of God with our God-given gifts. We are not of value because of those gifts but because we are loved by God as His children, redeemed by the precious blood of His son Jesus. The quality of humility that Jesus is talking about has a sociological dimension too. For Jesus is inviting us to associate with the so-called "lower classes" of society -- even the outcasts. Jesus invites us to change our social patterns in such a way that we connect with the homeless, the handicapped, the elderly, and the impoverished -- the "street people" of the world – with *agápe* love.

2) We need to remember that we are the invited guests: We celebrate that coming Banquet Feast in Heaven every time we come together for Our Lord's Supper in Holy Mass. We are the (spiritually) poor, crippled,

lame, and blind that Christ calls to himself. Our place is assured. Let us accept Jesus' invitation by actively participating in this Eucharistic celebration. Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk and writer, on receiving Holy Communion, writes that, as he received the Sacrament for the first time, as an adult, he thought to himself: *Heaven was entirely mine ... Christ, hidden in the small host, was giving himself for me and to me, and with himself the entire Godhead and Trinity ... Christ was born in me, his new Bethlehem, and sacrificed in me, his new Calvary, and risen in me ... (God) called out to me from his own immense depths* [*The Seven Story Mountain*, (New York: Doubleday Image Books), pp. 273-274]. Thomas Merton sensed the wonder of God's invitation to Communion and received it joyfully. So should we.

(Prepared by Fr. Tony Kadavil (stjohngrandbay.org) and published by CBCI)