



Daily Reflections

August 28, 2016

Scripture

Luke 14:1, 7-14

On a sabbath Jesus went to dine at the home of one of the leading Pharisees, and the people there were observing him carefully. He told a parable to those who had been invited, noticing how they were choosing the places of honor at the table. "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not recline at table in the place of honor. A more distinguished guest than you may have been invited by him, and the host who invited both of you may approach you and say, 'Give your place to this man,' and then you would proceed with embarrassment to take the lowest place. Rather, when you are invited, go and take the lowest place so that when the host comes to you he may say,

'My friend, move up to a higher position.'
Then you will enjoy the esteem of your companions at the table.
For every one who exalts himself will be humbled,
but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."
Then he said to the host who invited him,
"When you hold a lunch or a dinner,
do not invite your friends or your brothers
or your relatives or your wealthy neighbors,
in case they may invite you back and you have repayment.
Rather, when you hold a banquet,
invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind;
blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you.
For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Our Scripture Reflection

In today's Gospel text, Jesus gave 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." The Pharisees were preoccupied with "earning" a high place in Heaven. Jesus counseled them to practice what they preached 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 expected." 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 challenged 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 eternal life.

Food for your Journey

Who are the most beautiful people in the world? They are those who care for the least and the most lowly, as Jesus instructs His host in today's gospel. Was there ever anyone more beautiful than Mother Teresa? Mother Teresa's death came at the same time as the death of one of the world's most famous beautiful people, Princess Diana. Princess Diana was a young woman of many frailties, but she was fondly remembered, first of all, for her many acts of compassion. She cared for children. She cared for people with AIDS. Several years ago there were two images that leaped off of the front page of a Texas newspaper. One was the image of "Miss America." There on the front page of his newspaper was a list of the "vital statistics" of the Miss America winner. "She has brown hair and brown eyes. She knows how to sing and dance. She has the perfect figure: 35-24-35. She is Miss America. The paper said, "This is the standard for American women." There was no mention made of Miss America's convictions, her integrity, or her faith in God. In that same newspaper another woman was pictured in a small photo. Her face was very thin. Her skin was wrinkled with age, almost leathery. She had no makeup, no blush, no lipstick. But there was a faint smile and a glint in her eyes. She looked pale. The caption read: "Mother Teresa in serious condition." We know Mother Teresa's story. She won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1985, and she gave the two hundred thousand dollar prize to the poor of Calcutta. When a businessman bought her a new car, she sold it and gave the money to the underprivileged. She owned nothing. She owed nothing. Two women: Miss America and Mother Teresa. One walks the boardwalk; the other worked the alley. Two voices: one promises crowns, flowers and crowds; the other promised service, surrender, and joy. The contrast couldn't be any greater. Do you want to become truly a beautiful person? Jesus' answer in today's gospel is plain and simple. Look around for someone in need and make a sincere attempt to help. A person in need is not necessarily one who is poor. She/he may be a shut-in who is lonely, a teenager who is misunderstood, or an AIDS patient feeling rejected by his neighbors and by God, to name a few.

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 loin cloth 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 gave them a new dignity and a new name. He honored them by calling them HARIJANS, "the people of God."

Prayer from the Heart

Dear Jesus, help me to become humble so that I may pursue what really matters in this life. Amen.