

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
28th August 2022 - 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year C): 1st: Ecclesiasticus 3:19-21,30-31. Psalm: 67. 2nd: Hebrews 12:18-19,22-24.

Gospel: Luke 14:1,7-14

Seating arrangements at a table are notoriously difficult when planning weddings or special occasions of any kind. Noses must not be put out of joint, nor must warring parties be placed too close to one another. 'We're not sitting with him/her or them.' Things we know too well. And we know it happens also if someone else is sitting in "your pew."

Jesus uses the etiquette of table arrangements to teach about the nature of the kingdom of God. Jesus, the guest who has been asked only as a "curiosity" begins to dominate. Why are his fellow guests so lacking in humility? Why do they push and jockey to get the best places? Why did they make themselves so disagreeable? How could they expect to enjoy a party if they came in such spirit? Then he turned to the host: 'Why did you invite these people?'

A distinctive feature of biblical religion is its teaching about pride and its converse, humility; this is unparalleled in other religions and ethical systems. According to the Bible and to classical Christian moral teaching, pride is the very root and essence of sin. Sinfulness consists essentially in the rebellious pride which attributes to self the honour and glory that are due to God.

Pride was the sin of Adam, and throughout the Old Testament the condemnation of the proud and the commendation of the lowly, especially in Psalms and Wisdom Literature, form a remarkable anticipation of the revelation in Christ. Hence both our 1st reading from Ecclesiasticus (a Wisdom book) and the Psalm.

Boasting, and the pride which trusts in oneself or in any human prince or army, are constantly contrasted with the true humility which trusts in God alone. The proper attitude for humanity in the presence of the Lord is self-abasement and trustfulness.

In the New Testament the lowliness of the Incarnate Son of God is fittingly anticipated in Mary's Magnificat, 'he scatters the proud-hearted. He casts the mighty from their thrones and raises the lowly.'

The wonder of the divine humility, revealed in the manger of Bethlehem; in the life of a working man in Nazareth; and on the cross on high, has led people in every succeeding age to 'pour contempt on all my pride.' The washing of the disciple's feet was the perfect example of his life of lowliness.

It was even more by his life and deeds than by his words that he introduced a new virtue- Christian humility – into the world.

St Paul perceived this in his beautiful passage from Philippians 'His state was divine, yet he did not cling to his equality with God, but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave, and became as men are; and being as all men are he was humbler yet even to accepting death on a cross.'

The classic, as I ever remind you, is the 'I' crossed out. Any selfish, self-centred generation doesn't want to know or understand this. St Paul elsewhere says 'The Christian may boast of one thing and one thing only, the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Access to the feast in the kingdom is gifted by God. Simply to be at this feast is honour enough. Weekly, daily, Jesus invites us to His Supper. At Mass we gather around the Lord's Table, to be fed and nourished at his hand. Here there is no place of honour except for the Lord Jesus who is our host. Here we all stand; all of us, people in need of mercy and forgiveness, love and joy. We enter into communion with the Lord, not as a reward for good behaviour, but in order to be transformed and become more like Jesus.

Then in his power we can confidently invite others to join in building the kingdom of God.