

Homily St Pius & St Anthony 22nd Sunday Ordinary Year C1

With today's gospel, I ask, "Who is watching who?" I love how the opening line of the gospel has 'people observing him carefully' (Luke 14:1). So they have eyes on Him closely. But then in verse 7, it says Jesus told this parable "**noticing** how people were choosing the places of honor at the table." So, he had eyes in them! The people watching Jesus, being watched by Him! It reminds me of a picture I used to keep on my desk that showed a cat eyeing so closely a mouse approaching the porch he was perched on, the mouse in one of its little trails with the cat just about to pounce, but then right over its shoulder unseen is a dog watching his enemy the cat, from the deck above. Then throw in me, (or you or any viewer)! How the photographer ever got the shot, who knows? Like a ladder of humility, each level animal thought everything is best, and it could all be about to crash down! So Jesus here, is watching all of the hobnobbing & grandstanding that is going on at the head-tables at a banquet and he cautions his listeners to be humble and not presumptuous about claiming honor seats. Interestingly don't we call all humblings, 'getting put in our place'? Another humbling story (along this same theme of animal-stories) goes like this: It is a story of 'bully-goat' entering a tavern and pushing the doorman aside, swiping a biscuit from a table of a couple eating as he passed by like he owned the place, then shoving some coats off a stool and demanding of the bartender, "Give me cold lemonade-no ice". And unnoticed, a dog got up from the corner, swooshed over, rushing the goat, swept him off the stool to slam him against the bar, and just as quickly flipped him with his snout, against the swinging doors and out on to the sidewalk. So shocked at all this, the goat got up and squealed, "Just who do you think you are?" and the dog said, "I am the guy you thought you were when you walked in here." That is a humbling and putting into place for him!

So, Jesus wisely encourages banquet-goers to spare themselves the embarrassment of being demoted in the seating chart, by just simply taking first the lowest seat, for then it can only be **upward** from there. Jesus offers a proverb, saying "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11) Which is just what we mean when we say, that "The higher you rise, the harder you fall", so Jesus calls on us followers of Him, to keep close to the ground (*I see the connection between the English word 'humility' and Latin word 'humus' for earth or dirt*), and staying close to the ground then we do not have far to fall. Also, I think Jesus is saying, what I heard a parent say to his

child once, “Humble yourself son, or trust me there are people waiting in line in this world to do it for you!” These proverbs are all counseling wise and lowly estimations of ourselves. If there is more to us, then let someone else say it. Anything we accomplish or have, is a gift from God.

Yet, Jesus had warned publicly about such banquet pomp & ceremony, before when he called out the Pharisees in Mat 23:5-7, saying “All their works are performed **to be seen.....**They love **places of honor** at banquets, seats of honor in synagogues...” And He specifically mentions a case of ‘re-arranged’ seating based on honoring true humility and humbling such presumptuous pride, when one time Jesus Himself was amazed at a gentile centurion (outsider) who expresses complete trust in Him. At that time, Jesus said to His own disciples about it, “Amen, I say, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I say, many will come from the east and the west (outsiders!), and will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the banquet in the kingdom of heaven (ahead of you), but the children of the kingdom **will be driven out**” (Matt 8:10-12).

Frequently Jesus even has to call down His apostles from thinking too highly of themselves, such as we see when James and John presumptively want to take the seats of glory at Jesus’ right & left. But hold on, it was not just those two, because the reading goes on to say ‘the other ten got indignant’ over it, so they needed reminding to stay humble too (Mark 10:35-40, 41). Or even once, they were all getting into a spitting contest at, of all places, the Last Supper in Luke 22:24 “An argument broke out among them about which of them should be regarded as the greatest”. How did Jesus handle such confrontations with His apostles’ pride? In Matthew 18:1 when “At that time the disciples approached Jesus and said, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” **He called a child over, placed it in their midst....**”

Jesus often taught humility by saying such things as “the first is last and last shall be first” (Matt 20:16), ‘the least is greatest and greatest is least’ (Luke 9:48). But getting back to that Last Supper incident of the apostles arguing about who was greatest, doesn’t it make Jesus’ action there even more meaningful when we remember that it was at the Last Supper that he took on such a demeaning role Himself as to wash their feet! Him, their master & teacher, knelt down before them and washed their feet! Talk about lowering places. But He did it willingly and out of love (John 13:12-15). He is the model! Jesus wants us to be disciple servants and to keep honest self-appraisals of ourselves, always more

mindful of those around us than of ourselves (including the whole 'putting others first' talk). As always Jesus is asking for more from His own followers. He wishes that we start out lowly and humble: Because, for sure, if we are going to lift others up, we have to start lower to the ground than they are. Being like Jesus means we serve! Doing all that He did, not for any reward or recognition but simply for the good of belonging to Him, and keeping His Name as Christian.