

[Readings: Sir. 3:17-18, 20, 28-29; Ps. 68; Heb. 12:18-19, 22-24a; Lk. 14:1, 7-14]

We might have a misunderstanding about what genuine humility is. Too often this is misunderstood as being unassuming or being self-deprecating or even self-loathing.

Neither of those are actually signs of humility. Humility comes as a result of a **grateful heart** and a **servant spirit**. If a person is not thankful, then they believe that all they have is a result of their own hard work, which is never the case. We are able to accomplish what we do because others are willing to work with us or have done so much before us. Humility starts with a **grateful heart**.

It is kind of like the person who graduates from school and is not thankful for the efforts of the teachers, administrators, workers at the school and donors who have given them their example of sacrifice.

Being mindful of the contribution of others, especially of God, keeps our perspective in the right place and makes us humble. The same can be said of a **servant spirit** as an attitude to life. Here too, a humble person is able to recognize that greatness comes from my ability to make others great around me rather than simply to make myself look great. Though I may accomplish greatness personally, my positive impact will only affect myself and will end with my death. When I impact the lives of others in a positive way, then the true power of my life is seen long after I have died. The focus on the benefit of others is a key element to true humility.

Rarely is generosity offered in proportion to possessions. Instead, the most generous are often those with fewer resources. We give, not according to our means, but in response to our gratitude. We are a unique parish in that folks with great resources do give generously to our parish, especially when there is a special need. You have grateful hearts and a servant spirit. I know whenever I have asked for additional financial help, as I do in my column this weekend, you always comes forward to provide it. [CSA,... CSA,... CSA!...]

Today's Gospel dinner is tense. Luke tells us "the people there were observing Him carefully" (Lk 14:1). For a while now, some had been trying to "catch Him," a slip of the tongue, perhaps, or a slight infraction of law (Lk 11:53-54). In the verses before today's Gospel, Jesus heals a sick man on the Sabbath. By this time, too, the rumor was that Herod was out to get Him (cf. Lk 13:31). The tension surrounding Jesus was palpable. It wasn't a relaxing dinner at all; people were watching Jesus' every move. Sometimes this happens to me as well when I attend a public banquet. People keep an eye on me – where I am sitting, with whom I am sitting, and, especially, what I put on my plate at the buffet table! As Jesus draws nearer Jerusalem, things will get only more tense, until it all breaks into violence — the arrest, the scourging, the death.

Jesus sat at enough tables to know that folks who claim the best seats are normally consumed with themselves and are not inclined to receive anything offered to them.

Perhaps Jesus secretly wished He could dine at night with the beggars, the outcasts, the sick, and the sinners he met along the way each day. Much like Pope Francis does during his pastoral visits around the world. As busy as his pastoral schedule is, he always sets up one dinner with the poor and the outcast.

It's easy to throw a dinner party for people you like, admire, and enjoy. People who are like you and share your opinions, values, and style. Imagine hosting the homeless for a week, as we did with our annual Warming Center. I marveled at the intelligence, thoughtfulness and genuine holiness of our guests.

The banquet referenced in today's Gospel points to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and the Ultimate Eternal Banquet in Heaven. The guest list includes the poor. The crippled. The lame. Those who can't repay, who can't use their importance to increase our status. The banquet, as it turns out, is pure gift, pure joy, pure delight.

This is the banquet that the Church hosts each week. It is the banquet of the Eucharist, the mystery of Christ's body and blood. We invite the entire Church to eat at the Eucharistic altar, to discover a love that comes as pure gift. There are no places of honor. There are no places of prestige. Several years ago, I attended a function at a prestigious Episcopalian church in a very wealthy suburb. I was engaged in a conversation with one of their parishioners who was very wealthy and held a prominent role in the community. As we talked about theology, I said to him, "You pretty much agree to what we Catholics believe. Maybe you should become Catholic." His response floored me. He said, "At this church we have designated seating for people depending upon their social standing and economics. If I switched to your faith, I might end up sitting next to the man who fixes my car." I suggested that he stay put in his church!"

Those who dine at this banquet should learn the logic of this most peculiar of banquets and it should pass over into our homes. We welcome the hungry child, the lonely friend, the neighbor in need. We offer this hospitality because we have learned to assemble our guest list from Jesus Christ. It is a guest list of the lost, the lonely, the hungry, and the thirsty. We welcome these guests not in bitterness, not in the sense of our self-righteousness.

Your reflection questions for this week:

How do I maintain a sense of healthy humility? Who helps me keep my head on straight? What do I do to avoid the twin pitfalls of self-promotion or self-loathing? Can I accept that I am a "good-enough" human being?

In the banquet of life, am I more likely to simply enjoy the feast, or do I get trapped into not enjoying myself until I see who's got the place of honor and learn where I fit in the pecking order? What keeps me from simply being present for the "festal gathering"? Take a risk. Rearrange your table tonight or sometime this week. AMEN!