

St Pius & St Anthony 22nd Sunday Ordinary Time Year C(2025) Luke

So who is watching who? Luke 14:1 ominously says that Pharisees/crowd was watching Jesus carefully, but verse 7 says Jesus 'Notices' the elbowing going on among the Pharisees as they fight for the best seats in the house - places of honor! Maybe we've all been there - when I was a kid, we'd get caught up in such tussles, jockeying for position, we often would 'call shotgun' trying to call our own, the best seat! Like when we'd get ready to watch movies, we'd call 'I got the bean bag' up front on floor. Or we'd call the corner seat on the couch if we were at Grannie's (because you could cradle your head against the high back end, and nap while the adults talked) Or the best of best, was the window front seat in dad's 1962 impala when we were little. I always fought for that seat until one winter Saturday morning when I realized that the best seats come with their own hazards (like how the safest seats in airplanes are the ones near the tail?). What happened was that we traveling to basketball practice, after my brother won the fight and got the window. I had to sit low in middle of the bench seat, only getting to see the dash panel face! Well, on the way to practice, dad took a left turn, and suddenly his arm was pushing across my chest, pinching me back against the seat, and I recall thinking, "What gives, what did I do wrong?" Until I looked over and saw perfect open view of the house doors along the street- as Jeff's door had swung wide open by itself, in the turn and dad was grasping on to his arm to keep him from sliding right out the door on the ground - that door latch had tendency to freeze stuck open (this happened in the days before warning lights on our dash boards to say 'Door Ajar', & pre-'seatbelt law' days) So I learned that morning, the risk of the honor seat, was that you could lose it really fast-slide right out of it! *(But sitting shotgun by the window door, also meant more work, as you were the person who had to jump out quick to run up and knock on door to fetch our riders from their houses- or be the one to run in quick to the store and buy Gatorades!-the seat of honor came with chores!)*

So, seats of honor come with greater responsibility *(we remember Jesus saying a couple weeks ago "to whom much is given, more will be required" Luke 12:48)* But Jesus confronts that 'pushy' desire in us, to claim those seats over others. He calls down the Pharisees in today's gospel over it. But I note that it is not just Pharisees who have issues with hogging the best seats in public – we recall that His apostles, James and John have an episode of pushing to the front of the line against others, sneakily trying to squeeze into the honor seats at the left and right of Jesus (Mk10:35–45 & Mt 20:20–28). Jesus clearly says to them, "Don't fall into those powerplays against each other – putting each other down to feel bigger 'over them' - He calls His followers to just humbly go to the bottom first - take the lowest seat

Later in Luke 22:26-27, the apostles will argue about who's greatest..." Jesus there will say 'STOP-that's what the world does-not us'." He'll say, "The greatest among you is the least, and the leader is the servant" and very

directly He'll ask in verse 27 "Who is greater? the one seated at table or the one who serves? ...Yet, I am among you as the one who serves." The Servant leads the situation – they are the accomplishees – Jesus is saying, "Who is strongest? – the Servant gets it done and carries the group. So Jesus says, "Be humble and show strength by taking the lowest seat first – know it yourself and watch it unfold."

So Jesus' wisdom here is that humility comes knocking to everyone, so humble yourself first (its less painful than when it comes from the mouth/hand of someone else), I say it helps us, to take the lowest position, because it makes for a shorter fall- staying close to the ground means there's less distance to tumble downward. (But such a self-lowering, is very practical too, because if we take the lowest position ourselves, then "Hey, we can only go up from there.") Jesus wants humble disciples (or humbled ones)

Hearing all the talk about table service and banquets, reminds me of the story that happened to Sen Bill Bradley, a NJ senator. He was at a stuffy, big wig banquet and when the food was coming out, as *the waiter set down a side dish of potatoes to him, with a couple pats butter on it, Bradley asked for several more pats. But the waiter gently said, "The three pats are what all guests get to start, until after the main course is served to everyone. But Bradley was 'put out' by this refusal, said boastfully, "Do you know who I am –I played prop NBA for Knicks, and am now a US Senator serving on the IRS oversight Cmte, and I'd like more pats of butter". But the waiter was unbothered by such chest-thumping, and replied back, "Sir, do you know who I am? Right now, I am the one in charge of the butter."* So who has the power, the owner of the restaurant or the person serving you? If your hungry, the lowest is the greatest-the Server! (This is like a scene out of the Brad Pitt/Ed Norton movie fight club – its best to respect those waiters! They get things done!)

So Jesus' call to humility, is wisdom revealing a deep spiritual principle we also hear in the Old Testament proverb "Pride goes before the fall" (Proverb 16:18) or in the New Testament, God coming to aid of those perceived weak and meek. This raising up of the humble is so common in Jesus' teaching. Today He says, "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11). But all through the gospel of Luke we hear this. It starts at the beginning, in its first chapter, when Mary prays her 'Magnificat' saying, "*God has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly*" (1:52). It continues on in Jesus' beatitude teaching, of Luke 6:20-49, where the least, the poor, the deprived and the persecuted, hold the power to inherit the Kingdom, while woes are poured out upon the A-listers - the appeased, affluent, and arrogant. This empowering humility also runs through all of Jesus' experiences, such as in case of the Pharisee Banquet Host and the sinful woman (Lk 7:36-50) where she, who was looked down on, does everything right, humbly washing, drying and anointing Jesus' feet as loving service, while the supposedly righteous Pharisee Host neglects Jesus, offering no water, perfume or even towel

for Jesus. This humble theme is seen in so many of Jesus' parables too! In the Rich man & Lazarus (16:19-31) the person with everything, burns by losing it all, while the poor chap with nothing will gain all that's needed in the world to beyond.

Repeatedly in Luke's gospel, the 'high and mighty' getting knocked down notches in judgement, while the self-humbling lowly are lifted up and honored. They are blessed for their humility. We see this point in a lot of Jesus' wise one-liners, like 'First will be Last' (Lk 13:30), 'Least is the Greatest' (Lk 9:48) and here 'the Humbled are Exalted and the Exalted, Humbled' (14:11 & 18:14) The Spiritual Writer Richard Rohr has said that with Jesus "The way up is the way down" (*That's Jesus - Jn 3:13 "No one has ascended in to heaven except the one who came down...." & Philippians 2:7,8,9 'He emptied himself, humbled & was exalted above all'*). Jesus celebrates the lowly and left out, and challenges hard the powerful and the prestigious. Jesus' Way is to forsake the 'best seats'-the seats of honor, and to take up the lowest place first-Be the Servant. Jesus teaches the humble path of 'servant leadership' - leading from the bottom, knowing our place first. Jesus desires us to lift others up, not put them down, and to show our strength by empowering and giving strength to others – that is following Jesus, He who gave His life that we might have life, and life abundantly (John 10:10)