

Archbishop Lori's Homily: 22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

Ss. Philip and James, Homewood

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The Etiquette of the Gospel

We've all had the experience. We're at the supermarket or waiting in the security line at the airport. The lines are long and getting longer, and time is growing short.

Suddenly a new lane opens up and we rush to get into the new and shorter line. We try to get ahead of other people, perhaps because, deep down, without our ever saying so, we may think we're more important than they are!

It turns out we may not too different from the people we met in Jesus' parable: guests at a dinner who felt they were more important than other guests, so important, in fact, that they pushed ahead of others to claim places of honor.

Jesus advises us that in deferring to others we are likely to win their respect. And isn't that true? When fellow shoppers and passengers defer to us, cheerfully inviting us go ahead of them in line, we do tend to think well of them!

Here's another experience we've all had.

We're planning a birthday party or a wedding anniversary. The question comes up: whom should we invite? Naturally, on such, occasions we invite our family and friends.

But Jesus advises us to expand our guest list to include those in need. I am fortunate to know families that do just that. Whether it's Thanksgiving or Christmas or the 4th of July, they invite people who otherwise would have nowhere to go.

The poor, the sick, the frail elderly are almost always at their tables. The Kingdom of God is not far from such homes!

Pope St. John Paul II gave us a phrase to describe these good behaviors. He spoke of the “etiquette of the Gospel” – but by the word “etiquette” he did not mean the arcane and complicated rules of high society.

No, he meant a way of life that is marked by kindness, gentleness, and generosity. St. Paul called this “deferring to one another out of love,” a “Gospel hospitality” that welcomes those in need.

But every day we see homeless people on our streets. We know of people who are ill or neglected. We’d all like to think we are deferring to them and welcoming them, but it may just be that we’re not there yet.

Blessed are the Meek

Listening more closely to today’s Gospel, we can hear the voice of Christ, calling us to become more like himself by living the Beatitudes.

For example, when Jesus tells us not to seek places of honor, he’s really inviting us to imitate him – to be ‘meek and humble of heart’ – just as he is.

With a wisdom both divine and human, he teaches us that the quest for recognition, sooner or later, leads to our humiliation and perhaps even to our downfall.

Instead, he says, the true path to authentic glory is the way of humility: “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted” – in other words – ‘Blessed are the meek, blessed the humble, for they shall inherit the earth.’

But, dear friends, what does it mean to be “meek and humble” of heart? Does it have to do with being shy or unsure of ourselves? Or generally suffering from what we used to call an ‘inferiority complex?’ Does humility insist that we deny the gifts and talents we have received?

No, not at all!

Think for a moment about Jesus. Jesus did not hesitate to proclaim himself the Eternal Son of God the Father. In fulfilling the mission the Father entrusted to him,

Jesus was anything but shy and unsure of himself.

When he encountered hypocrisy, he could be fierce – just ask the Pharisees!

The Word Incarnate preached the Gospel without compromise. The Divine Physician did not hesitate to heal the sick and raise the dead. The beloved Son willingly accepted the Cross to save us.

Yet, with Jesus, it was never about his own self-importance. He came rather to do not his will, but the will of the Father who sent him. He spoke, not his own word, but the Word of the Father.

Though he was the sinless Son of God, he assumed the humility of our flesh, endured the shame of our sins, and embraced the infamy of the Cross.

As someone said of Jesus, he was not only humble; he was humility itself.

But, of course, we are not humility itself. Experience teaches that it is more difficult than we think to hold our egos in check. Pride has a way of disguising itself and then insinuating itself into our relationships with God and with others.

Actually, all sin is a form of pride, because, in sinning, we do more than break a rule. Instead, we assert that our will is more important than God's will, even as we foist our disordered desires and actions on other people.

Of course, sinful pride always tries to cover its tracks. We can appear to be pursuing holiness, while actually seeking attention and approval. We can appear to do good for others, while really seeking to enhance our reputation.

To root out pride, we must examine our consciences before God – not only our words and deeds, but also our intentions.

Let us ask: Are keeping the Commandments in the spirit of the Beatitudes? And if not, then let us turn to Jesus, who is meek and humble of heart.

Let us ask him for the grace and strength to conform our wills and hearts to his. In rooting out pride and in purifying our intentions, the regular and fruitful reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is indispensable.

Associating with the Lowly

Clearly, humility does not just pertain to our relationship with God; it also pertains to our relationships with others.

To be sure, it prompts us to put the interests of others ahead of our own.

But humility also leads us to do what Jesus did – to associate with the lowly.

I think, for example, of Pope Francis' readiness to go to the margins, as he puts it, whether it's celebrating Holy Thursday at a facility for troubled youth, or reaching out in person to refugees, or looking after the homeless in Rome.

But Pope Francis also warns us not to assume, wittingly or unwittingly, that somehow we are superior to those in need, whether it's an undocumented immigrant, an unemployed single mother, a young person addicted to drugs, or a prisoner languishing in a jail.

In Jesus' parable they were given a place of honor at the table. So too the marginalized deserve a place of deep respect at the table of our hearts, so that we may love them as God has first loved us. After all, before the sinless majesty of God, we are all debtors.

The Eucharist and the Heavenly Feast

The mere presence of Jesus at dinner in the Pharisee's home turned that event into a symbol of the heavenly banquet to which we've been invited. That banquet begins here and now in the celebration of the Eucharist where Jesus speaks to us through his Word and is substantially present in sacred Host.

Indeed, the banquet of the Eucharist participates in the great heavenly banquet, held in the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, attended countless angels arrayed in beauty and by the Virgin Mary and all the saints, enraptured one and all by the presence of the Risen and Exalted Lord by whose Blood we confidently have access to the Father.

The Eucharist is the most efficacious means by which we make our way to that

heavenly banquet of sublime joy, the great liturgy of heaven.

What trust, what joy, what love awaits us in heaven! But that joy can begin now, heaven can begin now, when we lay aside our self-importance and accept the grace to be humble of heart.

Heaven on earth begins when Jesus' love overtakes us here and now, so much so that we humbly and gratefully share his love with others.

Thus, as we take part in the Eucharist this Sunday, we have good grounds for hoping that one day, we too, will have a seat at the heavenly banquet!

May God bless us and keep us in that love!