

Father Brad Neely

Spps: Holy Trinity – Aug 29, 2010

22nd Sunday Ordinary Time, Cycle C

Sir 3: 17-18f; Heb 12: 18f; Lk 14: 1,7-14.

The custom at the time of Jesus dictated that one take the lesser seat among a group of people--- perhaps to be moved up to a more esteemed position.

Jesus, in the Gospel, takes note of the dinner guests of the Pharisees coming in and jockeying for the good seats.

He points out to them something that will reveal something of His own identity: ". . .every one who exalts himself will be **humbled**, but the one who **humbles** himself will be exalted." Who has humbled himself more than God, who took flesh and became part of His own creation--- eventually suffering on the Cross for our sake. But Jesus in this Gospel scene even goes beyond the seating issue. He suggests inviting the *poor*, the *blind*, and the *lame* to a festive meal, ---not just the "in" crowd.

All this must have really turned the Pharisees upside down. But one of the themes in the Gospel of Luke is that of "divine reversal." That is, in the divine kingdom of God, the last shall be first. Thus, the poor are among those who could be first. To live in this realm of divine reversal, one must be humble--- humble enough to consider others.

Remember the Catholic definition of **humility**?: *"the virtue by which a Christian acknowledges that God is the author of all good. Humility avoids inordinate ambition or pride, and provides the foundation for turning to God in prayer."*

This mentions the avoidance of pride, and pride is:

"undue self-esteem or self-love, which seeks attention and honor and sets oneself in competition with God."

[*"and sets oneself in competition with God."*]

These definitions suggest that we must be humble enough, not only to consider the welfare

of all the people around us, but humble enough to let **God** be God. Both counts are challenging. Giving priority to others is easy when we like them, but more of a thought process if they are not part of our "in crowd." But if the Gospel is truth, then we must believe it when Jesus says that we will be highly exalted when doing so.

On the other natter, we are highly challenged in this day and age to let **God** be God. There are abounding efforts to take God out of the human equation: Take God out of human sexuality--- take God out of the marriage bed--- redefine the marriage bed--- redefine marriage--- disregard God's role in the beginning and end of life--- decide for God who and when someone should live or die.

The two venues for humility are not unrelated--- the two venues of "others first" and "letting God be God."

We honor the welfare of others--- --we put others first--- exactly **when** we let God be God, because to do the opposite, to be prideful, with *"undue self-esteem or self-love, seeking attention and honor,* is to disregard and discredit the power, wisdom, and love of God, *deeming to set ourselves in competition."*

Pride can be more, then, than just an individual sin. It can lead to the shaping of whole cultures. The million dollar question is--- what will a culture shaped to exclude God really end up like? How will people actually be better off, and sitting at the head of the table? It would be better not to find the answer to that question. In other words, we need to act to counteract any trend eliminating God from sexuality, marriage, science, life, and death. How?

*by intentionally living our lives in humility before God.

*by sharing our lives humbly with others.

*by purposely promoting God and Gospel values in the world.

*by informed voting.

*by various forms of social activism.

In our **first** scripture reading today,
written by the wise sage Ben Sirach:
he echoes the Gospel,
even though this was written long before the Gospel:

*“conduct your affairs with **humility**,
and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts.*

Humble yourself the ***more***,

the greater you are,

and you will find favor with God.”

Isn't this what we want for ourselves

and for all the potential guests at the heavenly banquet?