

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ord. Time C/2013

The readings of this Sunday talk about the importance of virtues, especially that of humility. They show that to live a virtuous life makes people pleasing to God and appreciated by men. They invite us to look for virtues in our own relationship with one another, so that we please God who likes the humble and the meek.

The first reading gives advice for wise conduct and fruitful relationships. It shows that humility attracts human sympathy and brings God's favor. It equally shows that wisdom brings joy to the one who practices it and forgiveness of sins to the one who observes it. Finally, the text invites us to measure our greatness through our practice of humility.

What is behind this text is the idea that pride and pretension are main obstacles in our relationship with God and our fellows. Another idea is the truth that, while the wise is content with what he has, the prideful puts his heart on things beyond his reach.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel, as Jesus highlights the importance of humility as a contributing factor to an appreciative conduct in social relationships.

The Gospel starts by mentioning that Jesus was invited to dine in a house of one of the leading Pharisees. Many guests were also invited and they were all observing him. But, in truth, he was also observing them.

After having noticed how the guests were choosing the places of honor at table, he, then, tells them a parable. First, he says that when they are invited, they better not jump to the place of honor. The reason for such a conduct lies in the fact that if there is an important guest who deserves that place, it would be an embarrassment and a shame to be told to leave that place to him.

If that is true, then, it would be better when invited to go to the lowest place. In such case, if the host invites someone to a place of honor, that would be a big honor. Then, he gives a lesson for life, namely that "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted".

After this lesson, Jesus turned to the host and told him that when he gives a Lunch or a Dinner, it would be better to invite not friends and people who can pay him back what they have received, but rather the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind who have nothing to repay back. By acting in such a way, he will be repaid at the resurrection of the dead.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The point I want to share with you today is about the logic of God's kingdom. What do I mean by that? In fact, we live in society where hierarchy and ranks play a big role. Because of the structure of our society, each person wants to be recognized and honored for his merits and his services.

In such a case, when there is a dinner, especially when it is official, each person wants to sit at the place corresponding to his rank. We call that the respect of protocol. If people don't receive acknowledgment and honor they deserve, they might complain.

In truth, there is nothing wrong with such complaining, as well as there is nothing bad with being recognized in such gatherings. In the same way, being invited to a house of someone is a great honor as well as it is a great privilege for the host.

The logic of our society requires that the invited guest may in turn invite the host in order to repay him. We call that good manners and courtesy. While our society functions this way, the logic of God's kingdom is very different. It is not based on rank, merits, honor and pure reciprocity, but on sheer gratuity.

And that is what Jesus tries to formulate in today's Gospel. The first stage of that logic is humility. In fact, we have to understand that Jesus is not against people's ranks or positions. What he wants is that we change our attitude and the way we consider ourselves. In that sense, whatever might be our positions or rank, we have always to remember that we are just simple human beings like anybody else. God alone is above us all. Therefore, we have to be humble. But, the more we are humble, the greater we will appear before God and before men.

The second stage of that logic is the spiritual motivation. In fact, to be a host is a big privilege and those who are invited are certainly honored, but such a gesture should be done out of love of the kingdom. Why? Because when we offer a dinner to people who cannot pay us back, we make friends in heaven. Those people will certainly support us when the time of judgment will come at the end of time.

The foundation of this motivation lies in the fact that God is hidden in the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, the handicapped, the needy, etc. When we help those people, it is God himself we help with our material means. But, as God is the creator of the things we possess, he will not forget us and the good we have done to others.

Now, let me ask a question: does it mean that heaven is open to anyone who gives to the poor? Apparently, yes. However, we have to be cautious, especially with regard to the motivation that drives us. Why? Because, if we give to others in the same way we do with our income tax, it is as though we satisfy a duty, in which case we miss Jesus' point.

Moreover, if we give to others purely out of self-interest, as though we invest in God's account book, we miss Jesus' point. In such a case, our generosity is just a rationalization of our selfishness. The same is true if we give in order to feel superior. In such a case, our generosity becomes an act of condescension.

But, if we give out of love and because we cannot help it, that matches the spirit of Jesus and the logic of the kingdom. That is why we should never regret a good deed done in the name of our faith, even if we do not receive any recognition for it.

That is what the logic of the kingdom recommends, namely that we give out of love and for the glory of God and the welfare of our fellows. Let us pray that Jesus may help us to act like him with humility, compassion and respect for the dignity of those to whom we give. May God bless you all!

Sirach 3: 17-18, 20, 28-29; Hebrews 12: 18-19, 22-24a; Luke 14: 1, 7-14



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Contact: www.mbala.org

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