

He who humbles himself will be exalted

The gospel for this coming Sunday (Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost) is Luke 14:1-14. This text includes two narratives and a part of yet a third. All three in some way involve the religious leaders of that day.

This takes place on the Sabbath. The first is about Jesus being invited to dine with a ruler of the Pharisees. This was not a friendly setting. These religious leaders were watching to catch Jesus doing something that they could lead to their putting him to death.

Also attending was a man with dropsy. This condition of swelling, called edema today, is caused by water retention in the body. It was considered grotesque because of the disfigurement it caused. Some believed the cause was immorality. Jesus heals this man and then points to examples of when they would act to save an animal or a family member. They had no comeback.

A scene of a wedding feast is the setting for the second narrative. The issue here is that Jesus takes note that some of the invitees were choosing places of honor. Jesus once again uses this occasion to teach. The parable offers advice about manners in social situations and also applies to our pride before God. (TL SB) Guests were expected to give priority to those of higher rank, who would take the most prestigious places near the head of the group. (TL SB) when this did not happen there could be great embarrassment for those who had elevated themselves to higher places.

The parable's message is not about party manners. Rather, Jesus' teaching expands on his unique role as host of the Messianic banquet, who calls people into fellowship at the table of his Messianic Feast. The point of comparison of this parable is clearly stated in verse 11.

The person who boasts before God will be humbled in His judgment, while the one who humbly confesses sin may trust in Christ for forgiveness and so be raised up at the Last Day. Cf 1:51-52. (TL SB) This is another example of the great reversals that are a part of the Bible in general and the teaching of Jesus in the gospels. In our world of pride and self-promotion, God values humiliation. The passive verbs imply God as the agent; He exalts, He humbles.

The third lesson is in at the beginning of the parable of the Great Banquet (vv. 12-14). Here we see Jesus addressing what we understand to be the same man in verse 1 who laid the trap for Jesus. Perhaps the host was feeling smug as Jesus addressed the other guests. Now it is his turn, and Jesus uses exactly parallel grammar to address him. A favor done in expectation of reward or repayment does not express love. Nor is self-serving charity confined to the unregenerate. The key is one's selfless attitude toward others at the table, regardless of whether they are relatives, friends, or strangers.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to put my self-interests aside and totally trust in you. Help me to see everybody in my life to be a person who is loved deeply by you. Amen

