

Homily for the 22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time Year C.

Jesus tells a parable about a banquet, and about how our behavior at a banquet can result in either our shame or our honor. We have to admit that Jesus is wise here. He knows that what most motivates us is the avoidance of shame and embarrassment, and the hope of attaining some honor, some share in the spot light of life, some respect. In his parable about the banquet and choosing the lowest place, Jesus, of course, is really talking about humility. Humility is what motivates Jesus, as it does his mother Mary. But Jesus respects our own limitations and sensibilities. He knows that we are not going to do much if humility is the reason for our doing it. So Jesus gets us to humility by going through what he knows is really important to us: avoiding shame and achieving honor. Jesus does not deny us honor. But oddly, in his typically paradoxical way, he gets us to honor by the door of humility, a humility, though, that never descends into shame.

And we cannot doubt him, for Jesus is the wisdom of God; he is the sinless one, who, because of that, can only say what is true when he talks about the way things are with man and God.

The lesson of Jesus' parable is summed up in a line or two of our first reading. The first reading was from the Book of Sirach. "Let your humility be proportionate to your greatness," says Sirach, "then you will find favor with the Lord." You can hear the life of Mary in that verse. "God," she said, "has seen my humility," so the angel had said to her, "You have found favor with God."

"Let your humility be proportionate to your greatness." It is not hard to imagine the Creator saying this to the man and woman he had made on the sixth day. God made man in his own image, male and female he made them, to have dominion over the earth and all that moves upon it. Humans were the masterpiece of God's creation. No other creature was made "in the image of God." We can imagine, then, God saying to Adam and Eve, "you are my Image on earth; now, in proportion to this greatness that is yours, so let your humility be, and that will be your glory and mine."

In this light, then, "having dominion" and "ruling" over creation is not heavy-handed exploitation, but service and nurture and care. In our opening prayer today we said to God, "in your loving care, protect the good you have given us." The truth is rather just the opposite: God says to us, "In your loving care, protect the good I have given you." The greater you are, the more obvious your call to serve and protect.

In his parable Jesus uses the metaphor of a banquet. He does this a lot. A banquet is a uniquely

human invention. Even though raccoons wash their food before eating it, and cats approach their feeding dishes demurely, still, the word we use for animals eating is feed, not feast. Only humans feast; only humans have banquets. Humans surround the basic animal behavior of eating with beauty, with order, with grace. The metaphor of the banquet calls to mind all that is most distinctly human, gracious, festive and fun. Only humans make and enjoy wine. Only humans laugh.

We have the phrase, "the banquet of life," and we mean by it the vastness, the abundance, the diversity, the harmony, and the astounding fittingness and balance of the universe we live in. It was on the sixth day of Creation that God called us to the banquet of life. Everything was ready, the table, so to speak, laid, when we were at last invited, the image and likeness of the very God who made the feast. We were to be the first, but were invited last of all. "In proportion to your greatness, so let your humility be."

The scientific study of human origins is called paleoanthropology. Paleoanthropology tells us that we modern humans, the species *Homo Sapiens*, arrived on the scene in what is today Africa only about 100,000 years ago. When you consider that almost anywhere in this world of ours you can find a rock to sit on that is several billions of years old, the age of our race is a mere eye blink old. One hundred thousand years is not much, and it was less than that that we began to actualize in our behavior the potency that was ours as humans. It was only maybe 50,000 years ago that we began to behave as the Image of God; that we arrived at the banquet with the commission to serve the rest.

Human beings are the walking representations of God, with a call to responsible care and stewardship to the world and to the other species. The glory of creation and its perfection depend on our success as humans. Our libraries, as well as the surface of our earth and the quality of our water ways and of the atmosphere we breathe provide so many records of how we've done. They are so many mirrors into which looking we can see on our faces either honor or shame.

For many of us, rather than the Bible, it is bumper stickers that are a source of wisdom. One I saw the other day says so much: "Live simply, so that others may simply live." Nevertheless, the Bible gives us the fullest account of what it means for us to be at the banquet of life as the image of God. It gives us Jesus. St Paul calls Jesus simply "the image of the invisible God." "We see Jesus," says the Letter to the Hebrews, "who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor" because he served rather than expected to be served.

We are invited this morning to the Wedding Feast, the Supper of the Lamb, the Banquet of the Bread of Eternal Life. By our faithful enjoyment of the Eucharist, the love and self-giving of the Image of God, Jesus, begin to reconfigure our own selves into his image, into what we are created to be, into stewards and servants, whose honor is in being human, which means "of the humus," which proves the truth and the wisdom of simply being humble in the world, in proportion to our God-given greatness.

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