

XXII ORDINARY TIME– 1st September 2019

FOR EVERYONE WHO EXALTS HIMSELF WILL BE HUMBLLED, AND HE WHO HUMBLLES HIMSELF WILL BE EXALTED – Biblical commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Luke 14,1.7-14

One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully.

Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honour, saying to them, “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honour, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give your place to this person,’ and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher.’ Then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

It is the third and last time that Jesus eats at the home of a Pharisee. Whenever Jesus is at table with the Pharisees, these pious ones, these spiritual leaders, there are always occasions for conflict. This time the conflict is caused by Jesus himself, because at this table there is a sick person and Jesus asks if it is lawful or not to cure him on Saturday, the day when there is total rest.

Then Jesus attacks them naming them hypocrites, saying: “*Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?*” (verse 3) The Pharisees do not reply. After this Jesus continues “*Now he told a parable to those who were invited,..*” (they are all Pharisees) “*..when he noticed how they chose the places of honour..*”

The evangelist disapproves of this ambition, this vanity, which is typical of religious people, especially if they hold important positions, they feel important, and therefore the need to exhibit and manifest themselves, to make everyone aware of their importance by choosing the first and best places.

“*When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honour, lest someone more distinguished than you....*” Jesus refers to a famous and well known saying from the Book of Proverbs, chapter 25,6-7 “*Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great, for it is better to be told, “Come up here,” than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.*” And here is the lesson that Jesus gives, and it is a lesson that must be understood well: it is not for humility, but an invitation to do these things for love.

Why? To allow others, those who instead would have sat in the last place, to be placed in front. So it is not humility but love. Jesus is reversing the scale of society's values.

„.. so that when your host comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher.!’” Jesus invites these Pharisees, who he has already reproached saying that everything they do they do it out of self interest, to pass from the category of self interest to that of giving. *“Then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

Jesus who became the last, who stands by the rejected and the excluded, affirms that those who make themselves the last have communion with him, the fullness of the divine condition, those who think to put themselves above others, separating themselves from the others will be excluded. Then Jesus, to the Pharisee who invited him, addressed a very important warning that must be understood in the light of those bonds of friendship, kinship, interest, ties that sustain society, that support ecclesial and religious groups, who protect themselves at the expense of others. So it's a very severe and current warning.

“He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours,...” so, Jesus speaks of a sort of clique where there is a friendship and kinship, but above all there are common interests. A clique that protects itself from others, which excludes others and it is only for its own interests *“.. lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid..”* So Jesus denounces in a Pharisaic context the attitude of the Pharisees that everything they do they do out of interest. They do not know what disinterest, generosity and sharing are. And here is the offer of a solution that Jesus gives them.

“But when you give a feast, invite the poor,..” those who naturally cannot repay you. Then he adds *“...the crippled, the lame, the blind,...”* which are those categories of people who were excluded from the temple and the priesthood due to their infirmity. So Jesus in a very pious and religious environment, like that of the Pharisees who thought they were closest to God and according to their norms, their religious rules separated and excluded others from God, Jesus says "No, just invite those who are excluded".

How can this be translated and interpreted today? Those categories of people that we, based on religious, spiritual, ethnic, racial convictions, we consider the excluded, the invisible, the rejected, these are the very ones to which our attention must go.

“.. you will be blessed,..” blessed we know means fully happy *“..because they cannot repay you.”* Therefore Jesus invites this community of Pharisees to act no longer with interest, but with disinterest, always for generosity and love for others. And then, Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees so he uses religious categories that the Pharisees could understand *“For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”*

Therefore Jesus invites us not to pay attention to the immediate reward "I do you a favour because you do it to me", realizing this clique that excludes others from their own interests and well-being, but to turn all their attention to the good and to the welfare of others and then God will be their reward.

