

30. October 2021

The last place

Lk 14:1,7-11

Now it happened that on a Sabbath day Jesus had gone to share a meal in the house of one of the leading Pharisees; and they watched him closely. He then told the guests a parable, because he had noticed how they picked the places of honour. He said this, 'When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take your seat in the place of honour. A more distinguished person than you may have been invited, and the person who invited you both may come and say, "Give up your place to this man." And then, to your embarrassment, you will have to go and take the lowest place. No; when you are a guest, make your way to the lowest place and sit there, so that, when your host comes, he may say, "My friend, move up higher." Then, everyone with you at the table will see you honoured. For everyone who raises himself up will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be raised up.'

How important is this school of humility into which the Lord introduces us! Let us always keep in mind that the first and greatest obstacle on the path of following Christ is not the weakness of our flesh, but pride. Already in the temptation in Paradise, the Seducer awakened in man the desire to want to be like God (cf. Gen 3:5). We know that it was pride that caused Satan to fall, and this is our constant temptation. Pride is capable of closing the heart; whereas the falls we experience in the sensual sphere, while they weigh us down, do not necessarily close the heart and can even show us how much we are in need of God's mercy.

That is why it is so important that we embrace this very clear and concrete lesson that the Lord gives us in this area. We must learn not to seek honour from men, not to inwardly crave their praise, and not to become dependent on them or on the attention they give us. Our value is not in being recognised by others; it is in being God's beloved children and co-workers in His Kingdom. This value stands even when we can no longer "give" anything, when we are weakened and aged.... How strong is the temptation for us to derive our value from the recognition we enjoy among people!

In today's parable, the Lord teaches us not to exalt ourselves, not to put ourselves at the centre, not to draw attention to ourselves, but rather to remain consciously hidden.

This in no way means that we should neglect the mission entrusted to us, in case it brings us into the sight of others and attracts their attention. It is rather an inner attitude, which we have to learn and examine ourselves carefully.

Do we sometimes say things to attract attention, do we give the other person the space

they are entitled to or do we quickly focus the conversation on ourselves, are we too focused on our own person and easily forget that all good things and gifts come to us from God (Jas 1:17)?

The banquet that the Lord presents to us in today's Gospel also teaches us to cultivate our relationship with God in the proper way: We should consider Him as the host, who invites us to His banquet! Do we sit at the last place, grateful for the simple fact that we can partake of His table, knowing that we do not deserve it? At Holy Mass we daily utter these words: "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed", and so we remember that it is His grace that calls us and invites us to His table.

It is better to occupy the last place in the Kingdom of God than the first place in the kingdom of this world. With this consideration, we will be better able to resist the temptation to pride. And if we are invited to an earthly banquet, this lesson of Jesus helps us here too to wait for the place given to us by the host, while, for our part, we take the last place. This is to work concretely and actively on humility, although in this case we must be careful not to be inwardly expectant of the best place we can be given and not to be disappointed if we do not receive it.

We can hardly grow in humility if we are not able to endure humiliation. We may in fact be ignored, or our worth may not be recognised, or we may even be treated unfairly. In the face of such situations, a rebellion often arises within us. Let us accept them as a school of humility! It is not always necessary to make everything clear or to justify ourselves immediately, in order to keep our pride standing. We do not always have to defend ourselves at once, but we have to consider whether it is really necessary and desirable to clarify the situation, or whether, on the contrary, we are asked to make an act of humility.

Let us be honest: as beautiful as the virtue of humility is, it is not easy to achieve. Our honour is very susceptible to being wounded and we easily derive our value from the prestige and recognition we receive....

We have a long way to go, but if we follow the Lord, if we become more and more aware that everything comes from Him and thank Him, if we recognise the "ridiculousness" of pride and even learn to laugh at ourselves when we fall into it, then we can gradually grow in humility, even if we do not notice it. Moreover, we can always ask for humility, and the Lord will certainly not disregard such a sincere request.

But we must be careful not to miss any opportunity to practise humility!

NOTE: To go deeper into the subject of humility, it is recommended to watch the following conference by Brother Elijah:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SB1a3LO-ObQ>