

September 1, 2019

Sir 3:17-18; Heb 12:18-19,22-24a; Lk 14:1,7-14

We can easily fall into to worry about how others see us, to be concerned where we are located in the “pecking order” of the group, to worry about how much influence or image we have. However, if what we do to get attention and caring from others is to show off how good we look, or play up how much influence we have, or let everyone know what titles we have - then we maybe should think about what we are doing. Is this what Jesus is showing us?

To be honest I catch myself falling into this sometimes. It is easy. Whenever we feel a little “less than” whenever we feel the need for a boost of esteem - we go to the old worldly tried and true methods: brag, make yourself look better than someone else, pay attention to the one I think will benefit me. Jesus saw these same things in his own followers. Remember James and John getting their mom to lobby for high places in the administration of Jesus’ kingdom, Peter denying Jesus so he didn’t look bad in front of others, the people ready to thrown stones at the woman they though they were better than. Jesus show us that this is not the way to the Father, this is not the way to enter his kingdom. Jesus praises the publican who beats his breast and says *lord have mercy on me a sinner*, he holds a little child in the midst of the disciples wondering who is the best and tells them to be humble as the child, he gives the ultimate example of humility as he allows himself to be crucified for us - he who is God, who could have just stayed far above us, comes down to us. We hear in scripture: *though he was in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, ... he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death.*¹ This is not the way you get advancement in this world, but it is the way to greater heights in the kingdom of God.

But often we try to bring ourselves up in the world’s ways, we look to the world for the recipe for being special. Jesus reminds us in the Gospel: *Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled* - not just some of the people who exalt themselves but “everyone”! Exalting yourself is a sure trip to being humbled. Either we become humbled here on earth because, as you know you, can go from being a hero to hated with one negative thing you do, you can go from being the most favorite to the least favorite because of a switch in the one in charge. Even if you succeed in dying on top of the world, you then have to see where your game plan on earth has

¹ Philippians 2: 6-8

put you in God's kingdom. We forget that it is better to be a little lower in people's eyes in this temporary life and be better off in the next life which will last forever. We forget that it is more important to seek the esteem of God than of people, it is more important to follow our Father who promises love to his children, then follow a bunch of children who take back their promises.

Our first reading gives us direction on this: *My child, conduct your affairs with humility, and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts. Humble yourself the more, the greater you are, and you will find favor with God.* If we focused more on what God points out to us, and less on what we think will bring us glory, we would be a lot better off and be able to join, *the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven, [living with] God the judge of all*, as we heard in the second reading. This should be our goal, not how many people like us, or how good we look.

The biggest problem is that we want to pick where we will be in life, we want to set for ourselves a level of prestige that we think will impress others. We forget that the praise of people is fleeting and our plans often backfire. Look at the parable Jesus gives us today. He reminds us of what happens if you go in and try to get the high place. Picture a person who wants to be noticed, who wants so bad to be important that they walk into a wedding reception and seat themselves at the head table, although they are a distant cousin who barely knows the bride and groom. This person does this to get looked upon as a big shot - but Jesus reminds us all that getting the esteem of people doesn't always work the way we expect. We do things to look good, to be a big shot - and it blows up in our face. Just so in the parable, the person will have to be escorted publicly off the head table and be embarrassed. You know that when you go to a wedding reception, you are told where your seat is, and you just go to that place grateful to be invited. We need to be grateful for what we have and go to the place that God has pointed out to us, not just ignore God's directions and go to the place we think will look better to others.

We should be serving others - not using them for advancement. As Jesus says: *when you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.* Our focus should be on asking God to show us the place selected for us. To have the humility to accept this position and not say to God "do you know who I am?" Seeking to serve Jesus in our neighbors, not trying to gain prestige in human eyes but grow humbly closer to the Lord in esteem - this is the route to really being fulfilled. Drawing closer to God in prayer and in genuine love - this is the route to true greatness.