

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Today, we find Jesus dining at the home of a ruler of the Pharisees along with other prominent lawyers and Pharisees. It wasn't unusual. Jesus had done the same on previous occasions. But Jesus didn't dine just with the prominent and powerful; and He certainly didn't do it for His own advantage. Jesus was no respecter of persons; the Son of God, did not "*show ... partiality*" (Rom. 2:11), for one could just as likely find Jesus eating with "*tax collectors and sinners*" (Luke 5:29-30), much to the displeasure of the religious leaders.

And what a difference. The latter came to Jesus humbly, in repentance, and Jesus welcomed them; He forgave them; He encouraged them: "*I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance*" (Luke 5:32). And they went home justified (Luke 18:14).

The former were always a bit haughty, thinking themselves superior, always looking down on those manifest sinners. And because Jesus welcomed these sinners, the self-righteous Pharisees were always seeking ways to discredit Jesus, to catch Him in some fault, in some rule breaking that would cause people to turn away from Him.

The meal at the Pharisee's house in today's Gospel was just such an opportunity for them. It was a Sabbath, and a man came up to Jesus; he was suffering from dropsy — doctors today don't call it dropsy. They call it edema, a build up of fluid in tissue, a swelling generally in the lower extremities. We know today that there are lots of causes of dropsy, but immorality is not one of them. That's what the rabbis taught back then (Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, 579). Therefore, clearly this man was an unwelcome sinner in this Pharisee's house. But he was not unwelcome to Jesus.

Still, what was Jesus to do in this situation, here among these religious leaders? Healing the man would mean breaking their Sabbath rules that prohibited any work on the day of rest. After all, He had done that before, and as John reports: "*this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath*" (John 5:16). But Jesus was challenging their teaching regarding the Sabbath. After all, the Jews made provisions for circumcision to be done on the Sabbath. That was "work." Thus, Jesus confronted the Jews: "*you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law*

of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well?" (John 7:22-23).

Using Jesus' own logic, later rabbis made provision for doing such good on the Sabbath — yes, still with some restrictions, but they could do it. And modern day Jewish doctors follow many of the same provisions for caring for their patients on the Sabbath — updated because of modern technology. But here, Jesus is trailblazing, much to the ire of the leaders. *"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?"* Jesus taught "yes"; the Pharisees and lawyers didn't answer but surely seethed under their robes at Jesus' challenge. So Jesus proceeded to heal the man.

Or what about other "good" that one might do on a Sabbath, Jesus pressed the leaders. *"Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?"* Sabbath rules today sensibly permit Jewish farmers to care for their livestock. Thus, Jesus' question here, too, expected a "yes" answer. "You will do it. But you accuse me and others of breaking your Sabbath rules."

Still Jesus was gentle. He didn't call the Pharisees hypocrites as He had done before (Luke 13:15) and would do again (Matt. 23:13-29). But the Pharisees had no answer to Jesus' impeccable logic.

Jesus continued by calling out the Pharisees' elitist attitude. They thought themselves superior to other mere sinners. Jesus illustrated this attitude later with the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. You know that parable. The lesson from that parable and the one He tells today is the same: *"everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted"* (Luke 18:14).

God wants our humility, but not for its own sake. God wants our humility; He doesn't want to humiliate us, or demean us, or shame us. He wants our humility so that He might exalt us. He wants to exalt us.

If we come to Him in pride instead of humility, He will humble us as the prophet Isaiah says: *"the LORD of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up—and it shall be brought low"* (Isa. 2:12). Isaiah continues: *"the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low"* (Isa. 2:17). The blessed Virgin, too, sings of the Lord who *"scatters the proud in the imaginations of their hearts"* and who brings *"down the mighty from their thrones"* (Luke 1:51-52).

The problem, of course, is that we too often think too highly of ourselves. Surely, those were the Pharisees and lawyers in our Gospel text, and so Jesus told a parable of persons invited to a wedding feast who pridefully thought that **they** deserved to sit at the places of honor and arrogated to themselves to sit at the highest places. But they were humiliated when the host asked them to move down to a lower seat; they were shamed. Jesus taught instead, go first to the lowest seat, and if the host asks you to move up, you will be honored.

So it is in the kingdom of God, for remember: the Lord doesn't call upon us to humble ourselves because He likes to see us grovel. Rather the Lord calls upon us to humble ourselves, and He Himself will humble us, that He might exalt us in due time.

That's the way Jesus talks in the Gospel: *"everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."* And elsewhere in Scripture, like St. Peter, *"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you"* (1 Pet. 5:6). And like Mary, the mother of our Lord: the Lord exalts *"those of humble estate"* (Luke 1:52).

What is this humility? It's what we call repentance—admitting to God that we are sinners, just as He says, that we do not deserve the places of honor at the feast; rather, the lowest place. This humility is admitting that we are not God; Jesus is. It means admitting that God's thoughts and God's ways are higher than ours, and that we need to submit our fallen reason to God's almighty word—even to the foolishness of the word of the cross. It means admitting that we are not righteous, not a one of us, but that the Lord is our righteousness. It means admitting that in our unconverted flesh we are enemies of God, but that God's Son came down from the heavenly city to take on our flesh, suffering outside the gate for us, sanctifying us by His blood, laying down His life, calling us friend. It means taking refuge in the Lord, trusting that in Him you will not be put to shame, but will be invited to sit at His table.

The Lord doesn't want our self-exaltation; He wants to exalt us. So He calls on us to humble ourselves—that is, to live the Christian life of repentance, including trusting in Christ who cares for you, in the God who cares for you, especially through the humility and shame of His Son. St. Paul describes that this way, that *"though he was in the form of God, [He] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in*

the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:6-8).

But after His humiliation came exaltation in resurrection victory. Jesus rose again on the third day, and God gave Him *“the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father”* (Phil. 2:9-11). And through Him comes our own exaltation: *“in Christ shall all be made alive”* (1 Cor. 15:22). *“[T]hanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Cor. 15:57). In Christ, we have a seat at the table, and not the lowest place (though that’s what we deserve), but a place of honor, seated with Christ, invited to sup with Him at the eternal wedding feast in the lasting city that is to come.

Until that day when we will be called through death to the highest place in heaven, Jesus comes down to us in the lowest places on earth. He comes to dine with us as He does today in this Supper. For today He comes down with His body and blood to feed and nourish us by this Sacrament, and to strengthen us for the daunting and humbling days that lie ahead of us, to strengthen us for the day when He will come for us and take us unto Himself, when we will sit down with Him face to face in glorious exaltation.

Until that day, Lord, preserve us in faith by this word and sacrament.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.