Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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“My friend, move up to a higher position’ ((Luke 14:11).

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Sir 3:17-18, 20, 28-29; Ps 68; Heb 12:18-19, 22-24a; Lk 14:1, 7-14

Today’s parable of the guests at table fits well within the broader theme the scriptures have been exploring about who will get in the door or find a place in the Kingdom. Jesus uses the cultural pursuit of connections and social class to reveal the deeper challenge of finding God.

In first-century Palestine, social advancement was everything. If you wanted to get ahead, give a dinner or be invited to a dinner; cultivate the networks of reciprocity that earned you recognition and friends on the next rung up of the social and economic ladder.

The leading Pharisees could see that Jesus was an up-and-coming figure who was attracting attention, so they invited him to one of their carefully choreographed dinners to observe and listen to his message. He first offers conventional wisdom about how to feign humility to gain honor by being invited to move up higher at table. It is their kind of thinking, and they must have been impressed by how clever he was.

But then Jesus blows his cover by suggesting that the way to really “get ahead” was by ignoring the entire game of social climbing by inviting society’s outcasts -- the blind, the crippled and lame –- precisely those unlikely to reciprocate or gain you any points, except in the eyes of God. It is a radical, even outrageous, idea.

Jesus' invitation to his hosts was still, “Friends, come up higher,” but not in social standing. Rather he was challenging them to think higher, raise their sights to the transcendent values of love and hospitality for the needy, God’s beloved *anawim*, the little ones who will be first in the Kingdom. These are truly the friends in high places who will bless those fortunate enough to have the resources to give lavish dinner parties.

In celebrating Eucharist this weekend, we are being invited to take our place at table with Jesus, surrounded by everyone who is trying to deepen their discipleship. Do not be surprised to find sinners and outcasts, the blind and lame, at the head table and in every place. We are welcome because *all* are welcome, for this is the joy of the Gospel.

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