

October 2020

“For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” (Lk 14:11)

The Gospels often indicate Jesus’ willingness to accept invitations to share a meal together; such occasions were opportunities to come together, make friends and reinforce relationships.

In this passage from Luke’s Gospel, Jesus has been observing the behavior of the guests. As they race to occupy the places reserved for dignitaries, their anxious desire to affirm their social status is palpable.

But Jesus is thinking about another banquet: the one that will be offered to all the children in his Father’s house, without required entitlements based on alleged superiority.

Indeed, the best places will be reserved for those who put themselves last, at the service of others. This is why he proclaims:

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By making ourselves the center of attention — with our greed, pride, demands and complaints — we fall into the temptation of idolatry, that is, of worshipping false gods, who deserve neither honor nor trust.

The first thing Jesus seems to be asking us is to come down from the “pedestal” of our ego and make God himself — and not ourselves — the focus of attention in life. God must have the place of honor!

It is important to make room for him, deepen our relationship with him and learn from him the evangelical attitude of putting ourselves last. In fact, to do so is to choose the place that God himself chose in Jesus. Although he is Lord, he chose to share the human condition and proclaim his Father’s love to everyone.

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This is also a lesson on how to build fraternity, that is, how to form a community of men and women, adults and children, healthy and sick who are capable of building bridges and serving the common good.

Like Jesus, we can approach each neighbor without fear and walk side by side during both difficult and joyful times. We can value their qualities, share material and spiritual goods, encourage, give hope and forgive.

We will attain the heights of charity and the freedom of God's children. In a world where the desire for personal success has led to a breakdown of society, behaving in this way means going decidedly against the tide.

It is an entirely evangelical revolution.

This is the law of the Christian community, as the apostle Paul wrote: "In humility value others above yourselves" (Phil 2:3).

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In October 1995 Chiara Lubich wrote in a commentary, "Have you noticed? In the world everything has a completely different order. The law of the ego prevails ... And we know the painful consequences ... injustice, abuse of power and falsehood of every kind.

"Yet Jesus does not focus directly on these forms of abuse, but turns his attention to the human heart, the root from which they arise ... Our hearts must be transformed, if we are to acquire new attitudes and establish genuine and just relationships. To be humble does not only mean not being ambitious and dominant, it also means being aware of our own nothingness, feeling small before God and thus placing ourselves in his hands, like children.

"How can we be humble? By doing as Jesus did and acting out of love for our brothers and sisters. God considers that whatever we do to others is done to him. Therefore, it's a matter of putting ourselves in a lower place and serving them ... And we will certainly be exalted in the world to come, in the next life.

"This reversal of situations is already present in the Church: in fact, whoever commands must be ready to serve the others. Situations, therefore, have already changed. If these words that we have studied so carefully are lived out, the Church is already a sign of the world to come."

Letizia Magri