

Taking the Lowest Seat

My Brothers and Sisters in the Risen Lord,

Imagine being at a wedding reception where place cards are set for each guest. But instead of waiting to find your assigned seat, you march straight up to the head table and sit in the spot reserved for the best man or maid of honor. Moments later, the wedding planner taps you on the shoulder and politely ushers you to the back of the room where there's an open seat by the kitchen. Everyone notices. You feel the sting of embarrassment. That's the scene Jesus paints in this Sunday's Gospel from Luke 14:7-14.

Jesus is speaking to people who were obsessed with honor and status. In their culture, and especially at banquets, where you sat reflected your importance. But Jesus turns that logic upside down with a parable: when invited to a banquet, don't grab the place of honor. Choose the lowest seat. Then, the host may come and say, "Friend, move up higher."

Theologian Peter Kreeft insightfully comments, "Jesus aims always at the heart, not the hands; the motive, not just the act; the inner reality, not the outer appearance." Jesus is not simply offering etiquette advice. He's exposing our pride: our quiet (or not-so-quiet) desire to be noticed, honored, and rewarded. And he challenges us to a deeper level of humility.

There are different degrees of humility. The lowest is pride disguised as entitlement: "I deserve the best seat." The middle is strategic modesty: "I'll sit low so I can be invited higher." But the highest form is authentic humility: "I want the lowest seat because I want others to have the higher one." That's love that is real, selfless love.

Jesus calls us beyond appearances to genuine generosity. "Invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind," he says. Why? Because they can't repay you. That's the point. True humility doesn't calculate what it can gain. It simply gives. St. Francis prayed, "Grant that I may not so much seek to be loved as to love." And this is where God's economy looks so different from ours. In our world, status and recognition are prized. But in the Kingdom of God, the humble are lifted up. Those who take the last seat, serve quietly, and love without expecting return. These traits are the ones God will honor.

This parable leaves us with questions worth pondering: In my daily life, am I striving to be noticed or to serve? Do I give without expecting return? Am I willing to love, even when it costs me my place, my comfort, or my pride? Jesus invites us to choose the lower seat, not out of self-deprecation but out of love. For "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted." In God's banquet, the last shall be first. And the lowest place may, in the end, be the place of greatest honor.

Yours in Christ,
Fr. Rudy