

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

By: Fr. Alex McAllister SDS

Jesus is trying to preach the Pharisees about humility but he is having a hard job. He had just healed a man of dropsy right in front of them and as he did so he taunted them by asking whether it was lawful to do so on the Sabbath. That is why we have the phrase: *they watched him closely*. His audience was hostile.

This was no ordinary house; it was the house of a leading Pharisee and was full of lawyers and nitpickers. Moving on from the difficult topic of the appropriate observance of the Sabbath, Jesus tells them a parable about humility. It is hard to say whether Jesus was being deliberately provocative, but he was certainly being challenging. Challenging to them but also to us.

The parable that Jesus tells the guests is not a manual of table etiquette. He is not telling them about suitable arrangements for the seating plan at the table that day.

Remember, this is a parable and a parable is an analogy of the relationship between God and man. Jesus is talking about how we relate to God.

The table Jesus is talking about is not the table around which they were sitting at the moment it is the table of the heavenly banquet. The host is not the leading Pharisee it is God himself.

Jesus is telling them, and so also telling us, that it is our etiquette at the heavenly banquet that should be at the front of our minds. What is important is not who sits where at the dinner they are just having but who sits where in the Kingdom of God.

And moreover, he is telling them that quite different rules apply than those which seem to order our daily lives as laid down by the society that surrounds us. In the Kingdom the last shall be first and the first last. Those who are humble will be exalted and those who exalt themselves will be humbled.

This is the most extraordinary piece of good news-if, of course, you are humble. It is not such good news if you are by nature arrogant or think that you are, by some special quality, better than others.

We get now, as we must, to the nitty-gritty—what is humility? How can we be humble; surely this cannot mean self-abasement, which is as false as overweening arrogance? Jesus cannot ever want us to turn ourselves into something like Uriah Heep? Indeed not!

The English word humility derives from the Latin word *humus* meaning earth. The word therefore means being close to earth or, to put it better, being true to what we are. And I think that is the clue—being true to what we are.

If we can get into our heads a true understanding of who and what we are then our way through life and how to conduct ourselves becomes clear. It's the basic principles that matter.

And what are some of these basic principles:

1) god created us—he alone is the author of our being. We did nothing to bring ourselves into being and are therefore of no merit apart from him.

- 2) All men and women are created equally before God. There is no higher or lower type of human being - someone seriously deficient in certain important aspects is not lower or less worthy of respect than anyone else.
- 3) Falseness or artificiality of any kind has no place in the life of any human being—this shows a basic disrespect to our creator, as if we were saying that we could have done a better job ourselves.
- 4) In relation to God and regarding our place in heaven we can earn nothing—God cannot be bribed. What he gives to us in due time comes entirely free and is his own gift to us.

But, you might say, what about our human dignity and our basic self-respect? Surely one of the most important tasks of a parent is to enable a child to become self-confident? Surely, if we remove self-confidence and self-respect then the whole edifice of our personality will come crashing down?

This is certainly true and the parents who do not bring their child up to have a certain degree of self-confidence is failing in one of their most basic duties. But what we are talking about here is the wider picture. What Jesus wants us to understand is our place in relation to the rest of the world and most important of all in relation to God.

The praise for who we are, and what we have become, and the gifts we have developed is due in the first instance not to ourselves but to God. He is the giver of all. He is the power behind us. He knows and appreciates us even more than we do ourselves.

And this is why our first duty as human beings is to worship him—to pay honour and reverence to God our creator and sustainer.

Before this altar we are all equals, it doesn't matter what role we play in the liturgy or what status we have in society. We are all here for one thing: to give praise and glory to God and to receive from him nourishment for our souls.

And by our presence here we implicitly acknowledge our total and utter dependence on him.

Our real confidence comes from our faith in God—a God who sent his only son into this world to take on human form so that we might be saved from sin and death.

Our dignity actually comes, therefore, not from ourselves but from the incarnation of the Son of God. In our human form was considered a suitable state for the incarnation of Jesus then it must be a most wonderful condition indeed.

We see now our true dignity: our humanity raised up in holiness by Jesus who is truly human and truly divine.

We see now what humility consists in: being close to the earth but also close to God.

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Sirach 3:19-31

Hebrews 12:18-24

Luke 14:1-14

September 1, 2013

靈 修 生 活

謙、貧、愛

陳日君樞機主教

猶太人的功利概念很深，耶穌也只好遷就他們。祂說：「你被請時應坐末位，等主人來對你說---朋友，請上座吧。」又說：「你設宴時要請那些無力報答你的，那末當義人復活時，你將會得到報答。」

尼采曾說：耶穌的門徒是假謙虛，他們去坐末位就是為了被請上首位；他們是假慷慨，他們放棄現世的賞報無非是為了得到來世的。

其實基督徒謙虛和慷慨以基督為模範。祂謙抑自下，取了人性，絕不是為得到甚麼，而是為肩負我們的罪過；祂本是富有的，卻甘做窮人，為的是使我們富有。

尼采難道沒有遇到一個真正謙虛和慷慨的基督徒？他們只想愛基督、效法基督，絕沒有想從他們的謙德和愛德中得到甚麼賞報；只要能愛基督、肖似基督，他們就心滿意足。

不過話也可講回來。功利主義可有正確或不正確的，「正確的」功利主義也未必不算得是智慧。讓我們分析一下《德訓篇》說的：「你當謙下，這樣，你才能獲得上主的喜愛。」(讀經一) 為得到上主的喜愛而謙下，算不算是功利主義？算不算是智慧？

你知道一切美善都來自上主，如果你誇耀自己的偉大而輕視別人就會激怒上主，你因此謙和待人，期望得到上主的喜悅，受祂祝福。這不是智慧嗎(放棄假功利，追求真功利)？

你知道天主把這個世界的財富放在人手中，要人用來應付生活的需要，照顧自己及他人；你如果善待他人，幫天主照顧他們，天主會賞報你，你因此努力這樣去做，這不是按真理作出抉擇，最聰明的人生投資嗎？

按教會的道路，如果一個人為了害怕天主的懲罰而服從天主，他的行善避惡已是「天主的恩賜，聖神的推動」(天主教教理關於「不完美的」〔或所謂下等〕痛悔)。當然他的態度是奴隸的態度，但如果他忠心職守，正義的天主會賞報他。

那些為了賞報而服侍天主的就如商人，但在聖經裡耶穌多次讚賞精明的商人。其實人人追求幸福，以天主為我的幸福根本沒有錯，且正是追求「真福」哩！

有聖女說：「就算天要我下地獄，我也永遠愛祂。」她不是放棄了自己的幸福嗎？不，為她愛天主是至高的幸福，有了這個，地獄的苦也不怕了。

這已不是奴隸，不是商人的態度，而是天主兒女的愛，愛祂因為祂自身最可愛，愛祂因為祂先以父愛愛了我們。

耶穌介紹給我們的天主已不住在那噴出烈火、濃煙的山上，而是住在天上的耶路撒冷，是祂派了聖子來帶我們回到家裡。(讀經二)

真正的謙遜和慷慨也就是以這兒女的愛為基礎。做天主的子女是最大的福分，那末其他的身分、地位再不算甚麼，也沒有甚麼會使我以為我比別人強。大家都是天父所愛的子女，那末愛護他人該是我們的莫大榮耀，愈尚似貧窮、受苦的基督的，愈值得我們愛護，不只愛護他們，還希望成為他們中的一分子，做他們的朋友！

摘自「公教報」