**TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR C)**

St. Augustine, Bishop and Doctor of the Church; Blessed Juan Bautista Faubel Cano and Arturo Ros Montalt, Martyrs

Sir 3:17-18,20,28-29; Ps 68; Heb 12:18-19.22-24a; Lk 14:1,7-14

*God, in your goodness, you have made a home for the poor*

**COMMENTARY**

*The Invitations of Wisdom for Life (Instructions for a Life with Wisdom)*

We have heard today a very particular Gospel episode. Once again along his final journey to Jerusalem, Jesus is teaching wise attitudes. This happens in a very peculiar circumstance: at the dinner “at the home of one of the leading Pharisees”. These are therefore the advices “at the table” with which the Master of Nazareth proposes a kind of divine “etiquette” on behavior at banquets. This etiquette, in the final analysis, reflects the two attitudes of humility and generosity / gratuitousness. These are fundamental, indeed indispensable, to enter the Kingdom in the messianic time, and in general, fundamental in life before God and men. Therefore, a careful and more in-depth reflection is needed in this regard, starting with a closer look at the occasion on which Jesus taught.

*1. The Teaching Context*

Some curious and at the same time important details of the circumstance in Jesus’ teaching should be emphasized. It occurred during a dinner on a Saturday. So, it was a “festive”, solemn meal, “at the home of one of the leading Pharisees”. The title of the master of the house (“one of the leading Pharisees”) suggests the even more solemn character of the banquet. Most likely among those invited were many Pharisees and Doctors of the Law (cf. Lk 14:3) (they actually could “choose” the various places available!) This was not the only time that Jesus stayed at the home of the Pharisees. Nonetheless, what is singular here is precisely the solemnity of the case and the transversal “public”. Thus the teaching of Jesus later acquires a particular and universal value.

A curious, probably ironic note from the Evangelist Luke should also be noted: Jesus, who was initially “observed” by the guests (“the people there were observing him carefully”), actually becomes the one who observed them, “noticing how they were choosing the places of honor at the table”! Jesus’ eyes are like those of God who, in his wisdom, peer from above and see all the movements of men with the intentions of their heart (cf., for example, Ps 139[138],1-3). Thus, Jesus, the “divine observer”, teaches the wise ways of God on the basis of the concrete situations of human life, precisely in the manner of the wise men of Israel under the action of the divine Spirit down the centuries.

*2. For a wise humility (wisdom in humility)*

In fact, the first teaching of Jesus on this occasion, in style and content, follows an exquisitely “Jewish” wisdom reasoning with its vivacity and concreteness. By the way, we note that Jesus’ advice here did have a great success among his followers who literally put it into practice over the centuries. Even today, many Christians still come to the Eucharistic banquet in church and willingly put themselves back in the last places and sometimes even standing, always leaving the first pews empty!

Seriously, what Jesus recommended does not represent a simple advice for humility as a virtue in itself, but rather a humble behavior to wisely avoid a possible loss of face and to ensure a possible honor. It concretely and curiously reflects the recommendation of the Old Testament wisdom tradition in the book of Proverbs 25:6-7: *Claim no honor in the king’s presence, nor occupy the place of superiors; For it is better to be told, “Come up closer!” than to be humbled before the prince*. Similarly, it is emphasized in the same book: *The fear of the Lord is training for wisdom, and humility goes before honors* (Prov 15:33). The Israelite sage Sirach, which we heard in the first reading, developed the same wisdom thought, insisting on the need to always be humble, especially when “the greater you are”, so that “you will find favor with God.”

The last two quotations offer a clear theological and theo-centric orientation of “making oneself humble”: in the final analysis, it will be God who exalts, who glorifies the humble. This is also the perspective of Jesus’ proverbial saying which concludes his teaching on the subject: “Every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” We find here, in effect, the grammatical construction of the so-called theological or divine passive with God as the implied agent: the one who humbles himself/herself will be exalted by God, in conformity with the whole Judeo-Christian tradition in the Bible (cf., e.g., Ezek 21:26; especially Lk 1:52: “[God] He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones, but lifted up the lowly.”)

*3. For a wise and messianic generosity*

After the advice to the guests, Jesus offered another one “to the host who invited him”, as if to complete his teaching “at the table”. This second and last instruction of the block shows itself even more explicitly “theological” both in language and in content, because it is oriented towards the reward at the end of time, “at the resurrection of the righteous”, that is, with and in God. This perspective of God’s final reward is similar to that deriving from Jesus’ recommendation on how to pray, fast, and give alms for a new righteousness (cf. Mt 6:1-6, 16-18). Here, the generous but wise act of inviting to the banquet those who have nothing to repay is advised, and so God will bless and reward you. In some ways it reflects the conviction already expressed by the Psalmist who proclaims: “Blessed the one concerned for the poor; on a day of misfortune, the Lord delivers him.” (Ps 41:2)

However, in Jesus’ words there is something deeper than a simple recommendation of human generosity. In fact, “the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind” to be invited to the banquet are actually the four categories of people who are the privileged recipients of the Good News of divine salvation in the messianic time. They, the last of society, will be the guests to the messianic banquet God will offer at the end time. For this purpose, Jesus carries out his activities mostly among them. His mission, and subsequently that of his disciples, is reserved particularly and in the first place for the least considered, the marginalized, the most needy but forgotten and even despised by many. Those who invite them to lunch or dinner share the wisdom vision of Christ, their “friend”, and symbolically participate in the realization of God’s mission in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the generosity for “the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind” will also be “messianic”, because it reflects that of Christ, the Messiah of God. And in order to have such generosity, perhaps it takes so much humility and wisdom that comes from above.

We pray that God will also give us today the wisdom that comes from above which is Jesus Christ, His Son, so that we may know how to treasure today’s evangelical teaching. May we make ourselves humble in every situation of life and generous like Him in front of “the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind” of our time who are still numerous among us, in order to continue His mission to invite all to the banquet in the Kingdom of God. Amen.

*Useful points to consider:*

**POPE FRANCIS, *ANGELUS*, *Saint Peter’s Square, Sunday, 1 September 2019***

In the second parable, Jesus addresses *the one who invites* and, referring to the method of selecting guests, says to him: “when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you” (vv. 13-14). Here too, Jesus goes completely against the tide, manifesting as always, the logic of God the Father. And he also adds the key by which to interpret this discourse of his. And what is the key? A promise: if you do this, you “will be repaid at the resurrection of the just” (v. 14). This means that those who behave in this way will receive divine compensation, far superior to human repayment: I do this favour for you expecting you to do one for me. No, this is not Christian. Humble generosity is Christian. Indeed, human repayment usually distorts relationships, making them “commercial” by bringing personal interest into a relationship that should be generous and free. Instead, Jesus encourages *selfless generosity*, to pave our way toward a much greater joy, the joy of partaking in the very love of God who awaits us, all of us, at the heavenly banquet.

May the Virgin Mary, “humble beyond all creatures and more exalted” (Dante, *Paradiso*, xxxiii, 2), help us to recognize ourselves as we are, that is, small; and to give joyfully, without repayment.