

5TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, C CYCLE 2019

1st Reading: Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29 [Humble yourself and you will find favor with God.]

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 68 ["God, in your goodness, you have made a home for the poor"]

2nd Reading: Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24 [You have approached Mt Zion and the city of the living God.]

Gospel: Luke 14:1-14 [When you hold a banquet, invite the poor who cannot repay you.]

Jesus went to eat a meal on a Sabbath at the home of one of the leading Pharisees,
and the people there were observing him closely.

Directly in front of him was a man who suffered from dropsy.

Jesus asked the lawyers and the Pharisees,

"Is it lawful to cure on the Sabbath or not?" At this, they kept silent.

Jesus took the man, healed him, and sent him on his way.

Then he addressed himself to them: "If one of you has a son or an ox
and he falls into a pit, will you not immediately rescue him on the Sabbath day?"

This they could not answer.

He went on to address a parable to those who had been invited,
noticing how they were choosing the places of honor at the table.

"When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet,
do not sit at table in the place of honor.

A more distinguished guest than you may have been invited,
and the host who invited both of you may approach you and say,
'Give your place to this one,'

and then you would proceed with embarrassment to take the lowest place.

Rather, when you are invited, go and take the lowest place
so that when the host comes to you he may say,

'My friend, move up to a higher position.'

Then you will enjoy the esteem of your companions at the table.

For if you *exalt yourself*, you will be humbled,
but if you *humble yourself* you will be exalted."

Then Jesus said to the host who invited *him*,

"When you hold a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends
or your brothers or your relatives or your wealthy neighbors,
in case they may invite you back and you have repayment.

Rather, when you hold a banquet,

invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.

Blessed indeed will you be *because* of their inability to repay you.

For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

The Gospel of the Lord

[Luke 14: 1-14, 22nd Sunday, C cycle vv. 2-6 re-inserted]

♪♪ *Sacred the land, sacred the water, sacred the sky, holy and true.
Sacred all life, sacred each other, all reflect God who is good.* ♪♪

Jesus goes out to dinner, and immediately disturbs the peace of his host & the other guests. There was a sick person right in front of him who suffered from "dropsy" [dropsy would be called edema today, abnormal swelling]. He's one of the crippled, the lame, the poor he talks about at the end of the Gospel. One of those people who would never have been invited to this Sabbath dinner. One of those St. Francis would have called, "sacred."

Jesus asks about what is lawful. They were silent because there were two values involved. The letter of the law said you could not work on the Sabbath, but the Torah, the Prophets & the Psalms were very clear about the call to care for the poor. Today's Responsorial Psalm, the Word of God taken from Psalm 68, sings the same message Jesus teaches in parable and exhortation.

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

I purposely included the verses the lectionary omits in today's Gospel, the ones about the person Jesus heals, because they show what **God** values most. For Jesus, the needs of the poor are more important than sabbath regulations. The parable that follows is really about how **God** acts, and how you & I are called to respond.

Humbling myself is about my relationship with God, with the rest of the human race, & with the earth itself. It is about finding my own poverty, my own God sized hole which connects me with the one who alone can fill it. To exalt **myself** is a way of covering the weakness, the powerlessness which is the place where God meets me. It is a way to block God's healing love.

In the story Jesus tells, God is the host at the wedding banquet. It is God who calls me friend, it is God who gives me the gift of a place at the table. What that says to me is that you may be able to buy status, but you can only receive friendship.

Then Jesus applies this truth to the people at the dinner and to us today. He once again disturbs the false peace of the Pharisees by saying, *"Invite the poor and the humble to your banquets."* What he is saying is something like, *"This is the way God acts towards them, I challenge you to act like God does. Care for the poor, the crippled the lame & the blind, without expecting payment."*

Today we can hear his words as an invitation to care for the earth. Pope Francis gives us a vision of the earth as one of the poor, in need of our care. His encyclical, *Laudato Si*, is about care for the earth, our common home. He reminds us that to wound the earth is most damaging to the poor among us. It is based not only on the vision of St. Francis but also on the teaching of Christ:

He writes: "[The earth] now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use & abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters."

This is simply the teaching of Christ, applied by Pope Francis under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

But to respond to this teaching, we need to undergo a revolution of consciousness. We need to develop a wider worldview than the one most cultures simply accept as given. We need to see with new eyes. Just as another age went through the upheaval of realizing that the sun did not revolve around the earth, we need to change our vision of reality & see that humans are not the only creatures that God loves.

Pope Francis, & St. Francis propose a contemplative vision that includes all creatures - and the earth itself - as loved and cared for by God & inter-dependent on each other. Jesus is clear in teaching that when we oppress, exploit, torture, forsake, abuse or condemn one another, we are treating him in the same way. The Holy Spirit in our day is teaching us that we are called to repent of the ways that we have, & continue to oppress, exploit, abuse and condemn the earth itself, & many of her non-human creatures. The healing in today's Gospel brings out the wisdom of caring for even an animal in need.

Today, we are shocked when a dog or cat is abused, but too often ignore the abuse of the earth that supports life itself, or even of those people who are considered to be disposable. Science is teaching some of the same lessons. When I first visited the Epcot center at Disney world, I was deeply moved by a sign that I read there: "The earth is not an ecosystem to be preserved, nor is it a quarry to be mined, it is a garden to be cultivated."

I heard the same wisdom, inspired by the same Holy Spirit in words I read last Saturday when I visited the Native American Museum in Howe's Cave, near Cobleskill,

"Everything in this universe - from a blade of grass, to a human being, to a star - has duties to perform to keep balance and harmony. Human beings are set within this pantheon of the natural world... The sun is "Our Elder Brother;" the moon is "Our Grandmother;" the earth is "Our Mother," .. and the corn, beans, and squash are "Our Sisters." Giving thanks to all beings, from the earth to the stars is one of the primary duties humans have. Since humans are part of a universal family, equally important ... is to consider how decisions made today will affect seven generations forward." Those beautiful words reflect the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address

I even hear this counter-cultural truth in re-runs of Star Trek, where non-human races are treated with respect and are often teachers of wisdom.

That is the same vision of Francis of Assisi in his great poem, The Canticle of Creatures.

♪♪ All praise be yours through brother sun, bearing a likeness of you, most high one.

Sister earth, our mother who nurtures, feeding, yielding flower and herb."

Sacred the land, sacred the water, sacred the sky, holy and true.

Sacred all life, sacred each other, all reflect God who is good. ♪♪

[By the way, another translation of this canticle is the hymn *All Creatures of our God and King.*]

However, these insights go against the values of our culture so blatantly that many people don't apply what they read in the Bible or hear in Church to their business and political choices, and certainly not to the way they care for the earth when fires in the Amazon affect the climate of the **entire world**, when plastic in the Pacific & other oceans affects the whole food chain.

We are called to place the common good above our own profit, and challenge those who do not. Jesus calls us to live these Gospel values not only when we are in church, but when we do business, when we go to school, when we shop, when we vote & when we interact with each other.

Polluting the water, air and earth in the name of profit or jobs is a moral choice that does the most damage to those who can't afford to move. Ignoring the reality of climate change, & excusing ourselves for not doing what we can to slow it is an offense against the Gospel, the teaching of Christ & basic human values.

We need to discern who we vote for on all levels, in the light of the teachings & values of Jesus & even after the elections are over, we need to challenge those who are elected to make choices in our name that care for the poor, respect life and care for the environment. The survival of **our** humanity is at stake, perhaps the survival of humanity itself.

We may feel our inadequacy and our powerlessness to solve such huge problems as climate change, mass extinction, destruction of forests in the Amazon & refusal to respect all life on our common home, but healing always begins with a change in our consciousness - one person at a time, one family at a time, one parish at a time - and it can spread like a healing virus to the rest of our neighbors, our neighborhoods and even to the digital world.

The vision that can open the door to that healing is in the song I began with - words that sum up the vision of St. Francis, of Pope Francis and of the Gospel of Christ itself.

♪♪ *Sacred the land, sacred the water, sacred the sky, holy and true.
Sacred all life, sacred each other, all reflect God who is good.* ♪♪

