

"FIRST IMPRESSIONS"

22nd SUNDAY -C-

August 31, 2025

Sirach 3: 17-18, 20, 28-30; Ps. 68;

Hebrews 12: 18-19, 22-24; Luke 14: 1, 7-14

by **Jude Siciliano**, OP

Dear Preachers:

Jesus has been shocking his critics by healing on the Sabbath. Today he is invited to dine at the house of a leading Pharisee. But this is no friendly gathering. It is a trap.

After the meal, Jesus tells a parable that goes to the heart of his message: "For everyone who exalts self will be humbled, and the one who humbles self will be exalted." Scholars call this the "messianic inversion." In God's reign, the despised and the least come first. Those who were marginalized and labeled as "sinners"—supposedly being punished by God—are the very ones who receive God's favor.

Jesus challenges us to imitate God's generosity. We are to invite those who cannot repay us, just as God has invited us to this banquet, the Eucharist. Here, at this table, we are not guests because we earned it. God expects no payment. We are here because of pure grace, the free gift of Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

Gratitude calls us to act. Like Jesus' parable urges, we are to welcome the downcast, the outsider, and feed them what they most need—welcome, nourishment, education, protection. Does this not speak directly to the plight of unwanted immigrants among us—men, women, and children hiding in fear of arrest or deportation, some even confined in harsh detention centers, like Alligator Alcatraz? How can we, disciples of Christ, make them feel honored as guests in God's house?

Admittedly, inviting Jesus into our homes would not be easy. In today's gospel he barely sits down before correcting the guests, who are jockeying for places of honor. Then he challenges the host, telling him who not to invite, and who should be at his table. His words break all the rules of etiquette. But Jesus is not giving a lesson in manners; he is describing the way of life for his disciples, the conduct that reflects God's reign.

The Letter to the Hebrews reminds us today: Jesus has mediated a new covenant. We are not governed by the standards of this world, but by the life

he makes possible. Of course, in school we should strive for good grades, and in our work we aim to do well. That is not what Jesus is warning against. His concern is deeper: the motivation and values that guide our lives.

We use our gifts not for our own glory but for the well-being of others. We go beyond the minimum in our studies, our work, and our ministries, not to gain privilege, but to serve. We reach out to those Jesus names—"the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind." They cannot repay us, but Jesus promises: "You will be blessed indeed."

So, today's gospel leaves no doubt: God alone will exalt those who live with the humility Jesus describes. That does not mean we should never invite friends to dinner. Of course, we can—and should—share meals that deepen our friendships and build community. But Jesus warns us not to reduce hospitality to self-interest, not to invite only those who can repay the favor.

We must never forget the poor, the hungry, the outsider, those discarded by society. They need our voice, our presence, our advocacy. When we welcome them, we do not seek recognition or reward. We leave the recompense in God's hands.

And so we turn to the table before us now. At this Eucharist we are not the hosts—Jesus is. He has invited us out of love, not because he seeks something from us. He offers us food and drink chosen by him: bread and wine, signs of his total self-giving. Jesus is preparing us for a banquet where those in most need will receive honors and fulfillment. Since that will be the case, we ought to do some "kingdom practicing" now: act in ways that will reflect the kingdom in which we are already citizens—treat the poor as honored guests in our lives.

Here, social, economic, or political distinctions vanish. We share together the living presence of the risen Christ. We are drawn closer to him and to one another.

It is humbling to share this extravagant meal. We could never repay him. And yet, he continues to embrace us with unceasing love.

Click here for a link to this Sunday's readings:
<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/083125.cfm>