

## Historical Commentary



Twelfth Sunday of Trinitytide - Year C

The Liturgy Letter

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### Commentary on Luke 14:1, 7-14 from Church Fathers and John Calvin

Cyril of Alexandria: A Pharisee, of higher rank than usual, invited Jesus to a banquet. Although he knew their bad intentions, he went with him and ate in their company. He did not submit to this act of condescension to honor his host. He rather instructed his fellow guests by words and miraculous deeds that might lead them to the acknowledgment of the true service, even that taught us by the gospel. He knew that even against their will he would make them eyewitnesses of his power and his suprahuman glory. Perhaps they might believe that he is God and the Son of God, who took on our likeness but was unchanged and did not cease to be what he had been.

Cyril of Alexandria: “When,” he says, “a man more honorable than you comes, he that invited you and him will say, ‘Give this man place.’ ” Oh, what great shame is there in having to do this! It is like a theft, so to speak, and the restitution of the stolen goods. He must restore what he has seized because he had no right to take it. The modest and praiseworthy person, who without fear of blame might have claimed the dignity of sitting among the foremost, does not seek it. He yields to others what might be called his own, that he may not even seem to be overcome by empty pride. Such a one shall receive honor as his due. He says, “He shall hear him who invited him say, ‘Come up here.’ ”

If anyone among you wants to be set above others, let him win it by the decree of heaven and be crowned by those honors that God bestows. Let him surpass the many by having the testimony of glorious virtues. The rule of virtue is a lowly mind that does not love boasting. It is humility. The blessed Paul also counted this worthy of all esteem. He writes to those who eagerly desire saintly pursuits, “Love humility.”

Augustine: There are humble religious, and there are proud religious. The proud ones should not promise themselves the kingdom of God. The place to which dedicated chastity leads is certainly higher, but the one who exalts himself will be humbled. Why seek the higher place with an appetite for the heights, when you can make it simply by holding on to lowliness? If you exalt yourself, God throws you down. If you cast yourself down, God lifts you up. One may not add to or subtract from the Lord’s pronouncement.

Benedict of Nursia: The Scripture asserts that “everyone that exalts himself will be humbled, and he that humbles himself will be exalted...”

If we want to attain to true humility and come quickly to the top of that heavenly ascent to which we can only mount by lowliness in this present life, we must ascend by good works. We must erect the mystical ladder of Jacob, where angels ascending and descending appeared to him. Ascent and descent mean that we go downward when we exalt ourselves and rise when we are humbled. The ladder represents our life in this world, which our Lord erects to heaven when our heart is humbled. The sides of the ladder represent our soul and body, sides between which God has placed several rungs of humility and discipline, whereby we are to ascend if we would answer his call.

Irenaeus: Where are the hundredfold rewards in this age for the dinners offered to the poor? These things will be during the times of the kingdom, on the seventh day that is sanctified when God rested from all his works that he made. This is the true sabbath of the just, in which they will have no earthly work to do, but will have a table prepared before them by God, who will feed them with all kinds of delicacies.

John Calvin: *Vs. 7. And he spoke a parable to those who were invited.* We know to what an extent ambition prevailed among the Pharisees and all the scribes. While they desired to exercise a haughty dominion over all other men, the superiority among themselves was likewise an object of emulation. It is constantly the case with men who are desirous of empty applause, that they cherish envy towards each other, every one endeavoring to draw to himself what others imagine to be due to them. Thus the Pharisees and scribes, while they were all equally disposed, in presence of the people, to glory in the title of holy order, are now disputing among themselves about the degree of honor, because everyone claims for himself the highest place.

This ambition of theirs Christ exposes to ridicule by an appropriate parable. If any one sitting at another man’s table were to occupy the highest place, and were afterwards compelled to give way to a more honorable person, it would not be without shame and dishonor that he was ordered by the master of the feast to take a different place. But the same thing must happen to all who proudly give themselves out as superior to others; for God will bring upon them disgrace and contempt. It must be observed, that Christ is not now speaking of outward and civil modesty; for we often see that the haughtiest men excel in this respect, and civilly, as the phrase is, profess great modesty. But by a comparison taken from men, he describes what we ought to be inwardly before God. “Were it to happen that a guest should foolishly take possession of the highest place, and should, on that account, be put down to the lowest, he would be so completely overpowered with shame as to wish that he had never gone higher. Lest the same thing should happen to you, that God would punish your arrogance with the deepest disgrace, resolve, of your own accord, to be humble and modest.”

*Vs. 11. For every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled.* This clause makes it evident that ambition was the subject of which Christ was speaking; for he does not state what usually happens in the ordinary life of men, but declares that God will be their Judge, who

resisteth the proud, and humbleth their haughtiness, but giveth grace to the humble, ([James 4:6](#); [1 Peter 5:5](#); [Psalm 138:6](#).) Scripture is full of similar testimonies, that God is an enemy to all who desire to exalt themselves, as all who claim for themselves any merit must of necessity make war with Him. It is a manifestation of pride to boast of the gifts of God, as if there were any excellence in ourselves, that would exalt us on the ground of our own merit. Humility, on the other hand, must be not only an unfeigned abasement, but a real annihilation of ourselves, proceeding from a thorough knowledge of our own weakness, the entire absence of lofty pretensions, and a conviction that whatever excellence we possess comes from the grace of God alone.

*Vs. 12. When thou makest a dinner.* Those who think that this is an absolute condemnation of entertainments given by relatives and friends to each other, take away a part of civility from among men. It were not only unfeeling, but barbarous, to exclude relatives from the hospitable table, and to class them only with strangers. Christ did not intend to dissuade us from every thing courteous, but merely to show, that acts of civility, which are customary among men, are no proof whatever of charity. To perform any act, in the hope of a reward, to rich men, from whom we expect a similar return, is not generosity, but a system of commercial exchange; and, in like manner, kind offices, rendered from mercenary views, are of no account in the sight of God, and do not deserve to be ascribed to charity. If I entertain at supper my relatives or rich friends, the act of civility ought not in itself to be condemned, but, as a proof of charity, it will have no value whatever; for we frequently see that persons who are extremely selfish grudge no expense or luxury in treating their friends. What then? You may spread a table for the rich, but, at the same time, you must not neglect the poor; you may feast with your friends and relatives, but you must not shut out strangers, if they shall happen to be poor, and if you shall have the means of relieving their wants. In a word, the meaning of the passage is, that those who are kind to relatives and friends, but are unkind towards the poor, are entitled to no commendation; because they do not exercise charity, but consult only their own gain or ambition.

Christ addresses, in a particular manner, the person who had invited him; because he perceived that he was too much addicted to pomp and luxury, and was so desirous to obtain the applause and favor of the rich, that he cared very little about the poor. Accordingly, in the person of one man, this reproof is directed against all those who spend their wealth in ambitious display, or who bargain for mutual compensation, but leave nothing over for the poor, as if they were afraid that whatever is gratuitously bestowed would be lost.

*Vs. 14. And thou shalt be blessed.* Christ pronounces those to be blessed who exercise liberality without any expectation of earthly reward; for they manifestly look to God. Those who constantly keep in view their own advantage, or who are driven by the gale of popularity, have no right to expect a reward from God.