

The gospel reading today reminds us of something that we should have learned as children, but many of us never did. "Pride goeth before the fall." A smart person is a humble person, an unassuming person. Luke tells us this in the form of a parable, but the text is very awkward, as if Luke lost track of what he was trying to say. Even so, the story comes across with a very strong teaching point, and we remember it.

Jesus was invited to a dinner party. A lot of the gospel stories are centered on dinner parties, and it seems to me that the early church drew a parallel with heaven and dinner parties, salvation often being represented in terms of presence at a heavenly banquet. So we have this banquet, at which Jesus was a guest. Luke would have us understand that the host was a man of privilege and wealth, and of the uptight and arrogant religious persuasion, the "holier-than-thou" type that we have all had to endure from time to time. In this story, the host represents all that is haughty and arrogant, insolent, contemptuous and rude. Luke would have us understand that most of the guests were just like him. "Birds of a feather flock together." It is in this context that our Lord, the odd man out, chose to speak out.

Jesus, Luke suggested, took note of how each person present placed himself at the table, struggling to see if he could manage the highest place of honor. Jesus gave them some good, pragmatic social advice as well as guidance on how one should live his life, if the goal is to sit at the heavenly banquet, to be present with the righteous in the Kingdom of God. Jesus said, "Don't try to grab a higher place at the expense of others. Humble yourself; take the lowest seat. If you are invited higher, you will be honored in the presence of all. If you try to put yourself ahead, at the expense of others, you may find yourself with a very red face."

What does all this have to do with spirituality and righteousness? The Bible tells us that there is a "Golden Rule." "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." This is not a bad thing to ingrain in our memories. It will serve us well. The "Golden Rule" helps us to stay balanced, to avoid selfishness, to seek to love others as Christ loved us. It reminds us that as Christians, we are expected to respect the dignity of everyone. It reminds us to be kind, to be merciful. It drives us to justice. Above all, it keeps us humble.

You know, we sometimes think that humility is a sign of weakness, but to the contrary, I think it is the greatest sign of strength. It is also a primary attribute of Jesus, for those who would make the imitation of Christ their life's goal. We are taught that Jesus humbled himself in the Incarnation, because as God's Word, he took on human form. We are taught that Jesus humbled himself by dwelling among us, subjecting himself to all of the emotions, all of the tribulation and all of the temptations of humanity, and lived his life in dignity and without sin. We are taught that in his greatest act of humility, he

endured the Cross and that his exaltation Easter Day derived from his willingness to place himself beneath all others by dying for us. Humility is the antithesis of arrogance and pride. It is the greatest of Christian attributes. If you are seeking God's Kingdom, the roadway is marked by the unselfish love of others. *Amen.*