

Lowly Ones Invited
(Luke 14:7-11)
Pastor Espinosa

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. It is easy to underestimate the importance of humility, making oneself low. Surely anyone who thinks himself or herself humble, is not. If you think you're humble, then you are proud of your so-called "humility" and you're not humble at all. Anyone who says, "It's hard to be humble," while implying that they are, is in fact revealing that it is easy – rather – for them to be proud. And yet humility is a desperately needed virtue for the healing of our families and our nation. It is needed for the well-being of our souls and for our ability to recognize our Savior, the One whose humility saved you from damnation; and saved you to glory.

Without humility, we are ready to tear each other apart, convincing ourselves that we deserve the higher places of honor (and therefore we sit in the higher places to judge others) so that those we criticize should be cast down and made low. The current political mud-slinging which has no bounds is a temptation to our flesh each and every day to engage in the same insanity. Lost is intellectual analysis of the issues and the application of virtue which speaks for itself without the insistence of "against the man" attacks towards the opposition. And of course I too am less than humble as I bemoan the current state of affairs.

And when we do this, our sinful pride feels great. We convince ourselves that we are better than others. It is a great feeling and it proves that apart from Jesus we are lost. But such an outlook is one of anxiety and fear: driving us to try to rise above the threats of those who think differently; of those therefore we perceive to be a threat. And in perceiving only threats and danger means we live in fear. Faith exits (note the word "EXITS") when humility is absent. Humility, on the other hand, is threatened by nothing. The one who is humble relies on God whether exalted or insulted by men.

So those who are truly humble live without fear of shame (Buls, Exegetical Notes, Gospel Texts, Series C, 48 & 49). They don't need to compete. They have no pressure in their souls to be better than someone else. They are free from the societal thirst to be better than others. Humility is the virtue of healing, but we fight against it. And even when people *seem* humble, they are often only playing a game and faking it. Not really humble, but acting humble, so that they would be lifted up by other people. So the appearance of humility is often only the mask of pride.

And yet humility is assuredly needed. Cyril of Alexandria said, "The rule of virtue is a lowly mind that does not love boasting (Just, Ed., Ancient Christian Commentary: New Testament III. 236) And yet, our flesh will not comply. St. Jerome said that he never met anyone who "could despise praise of himself (Luther, AE 27:101)." Luther said, "For it is pleasant to be pointed at and to have people say, 'There he is!' (LW 27:98)."

We are stuck in our pride and yet the Lord will not let this stand if we are to live as His people:

Matthew 18:4: "Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

James 4:10: "Humble yourself before the Lord, and he will exalt you."

1st Peter 5:6: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you."

Romans 12:16: "Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight."

Philippians 2:3: "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves."

And yet this is not our instinct. Not even close. The Pharisees recorded in our gospel from Luke 14 show us human nature. There they were vying for the best seats, the places of honor. But Jesus came to this house of a ruler of the Pharisees. It appears that Jesus was waiting to allow the proud men to scramble for the best seats, so that He could "take whatever place was left or whatever place the host assigned to him (Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel. 770)."

The Lord went on to teach proper etiquette, not only for a wedding feast, but for the soul. He taught: ***"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*** (Luke 14:11) We need to take note that in this verse there are two passives that can't be missed: "will be humbled" and "will be exalted." In these two words, it is God who is acting, not us.

This teaches us a lot about true humility, it is not something we generate. We don't wake up one morning and determine that we are suddenly going to be humble. Our flesh will not allow that. Instead, God must get involved. And in mercy, He does. But how? In Jesus' teaching in Luke 14, it was only when pride gets the best of a person – when they are in the midst of their vain-glory and looking to look good – that God intervenes and makes that person humble. God knocks down the proud person. When the person raises himself, God does him a favor and makes him low. Thus, St. Paul confessed to his "thorn in the flesh to keep him from becoming conceited (2 Cor. 12:7)."

Luther explained: "From this it is evident that God had a good purpose in mind when He attached suffering to the teaching of the Gospel, and that He did so for a very necessary reason and for our own great benefit (LW 27:101)." He also wrote: "This millstone [our being made low in suffering] must be fastened round our neck to keep us from being infected by that poison of vainglory (Ibid, 102)."

That is, for the sake of true humility in our lives, the Lord allows us to go through the life events that knock us down so that our pride is crushed. Let's face it, this is a hard teaching, but in truth it's not like we have to go looking for God to humble us. All we have to do is live faithfully in our vocations: be a faithful husband, a faithful wife, be a faithful father, be a faithful mother, be a faithful son, be a faithful daughter, be a responsible citizen, be a hard worker. Just be what God has made you to be while striving to be faithful, and the holy crosses will come all by themselves. And we will be made low.

And if we ended here, all of this might sound like a neatly packaged spiritual formula for achieving virtue, so that we might feel pride again. So we save the best for last.

Jesus said, ***"and he who humbles himself, will be exalted."*** (v 11) This sounds like we make ourselves humble first, but not so fast. Our circumstances that cause suffering lead us to confess our lowliness. In these trials that raise fear and anxiety; that make us feel left out and excluded; and that raise great dread that we are very much threatened, we cry out (we live out true lowliness; and this is no longer a show; it is how we pray when we are all alone, because we see our sin; and we see our weakness...we know our desperation), and this one, such a child of God, is then exalted by God.

And this leads me to point out that being made low (humility) isn't even the key word in this section of Luke 14, but rather the word "invited" or "called" is. The comfort we have Christians is that when we are crushed and made low, a call comes; an invitation is rendered. God says, "come up here!" You are welcomed and invited, because the Lord only saves sinners! Only sinners are moved up and exalted. Only those who know tears have them wiped away; only those who know their weakness, receive overflowing strength; only those made low, may be lifted up. That's you, and that's me, but it all happens because someone had to go first to pave the way of humility. The Only One who could.

Beyond the matter of the highest seats and the lowest seats, is the One who had no seat at all. Jesus once said – also recorded in Luke's Gospel (Luke 22:27) – "For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves (brought out by Just, Concordia Commentary: Luke 9:51-24:53. 573)." Jesus, the very Son of God, true God and true man; the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, humbled Himself and in grace seated you at His table where you receive His salvation poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. It is here [point to altar] that He serves you. He

humbled Himself as Servant, as the One who heard your cry and in His service you are lifted up Christian!

From the Epitome of the Lutheran Confessions (Article VIII on The Person of Christ): “But in the state of humiliation he dispensed with [His divine majesty]...for he did not always disclose this majesty, but only when it pleased him (Tappert. 489).” And from the Solid Declaration of the Lutheran Confessions (Article VIII on The Person of Christ): “He had this majesty at his conception even in his mother’s womb, but, as the apostle testifies, he laid it aside, and as Dr. Luther explains it, he kept it hidden during the state of humiliation and did not use it at all times, but only when he wanted to (Tappert. 596).”

The Lord Jesus as is recorded in Philippians 2:7 “made himself nothing;” He made Himself low; He made Himself humble. Why? To save you; to give His life for yours, so that you who have been made low through your trials would be exalted by His victory and exaltation over sin and death; over shame and guilt; over fear and dread; over your own pride; and over the devil who has tried to destroy you. But Christ has said, “No way!” to your enemy! For Jesus the Victor has conquered so that even your being made low has turned to exaltation – already now in the promise – and yet to come in the future glory about to be revealed. You’ve been called, you’ve been invited. God came and comes to you when you were down and when you are down, and in the greatest love and mercy through His Son -- who became as nothing for you while hanging despised on the cross while shedding His all-healing blood -- lifts you up Christian. He’s made you humble and so you confess your sin (thus you have “humbled yourself”) and now the promise is yours: “[you] will be exalted.”!