

II TRINITY 2016

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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1 JOHN 3.13 St. LUKE 14.16



News Flash! Important civic leader gives extravagant dinner...many upstanding members of the community are invited...few show up...offering lame excuses. Civic leader sends his assistants out into the worst streets in the city...where they encounter the dregs of society. Every table is full. Those upstanding members of the community...they lost out big time.

Today's Gospel is actually a story within a story. Let's place the Parable of the Great Feast in context...Jesus is the guest of a local civic leader on the Sabbath day. He amuses himself watching people push each other out of the way to get the best seats at the table...close to the host...of course everyone wants to be near the host.

Jesus first heals a man with edema and then responds to criticism about his healing on the Sabbath by saying it was the right thing for him to do...after all...wouldn't they rush to save an ox or son who fell into a well from drowning? Of course they would have. His critics had to remain silent since any further criticism of Jesus' actions would have made them look foolish.

Jesus then gives some practical advice on humility and hospitality. He tells people who are so intent on getting the best seats at the table to stop and think for a minute...they might get that coveted seat...and then be asked to move. Think of the embarrassment being forced to move to another seat would cause them.

In the Parable of the Great Feast, Jesus tells the story of an important civic leader who is hosting an extravagant dinner. Many equally important people who were invited make lame excuses for not coming. In the end, every table is full, only after the host sends out his assistants to every street and alley in the city...where even the worst of the worst...the marginalized and disenfranchised of society...get a seat at the hosts table. The story concludes with the host saying none of the original guests will ever guest to eat at his table.

The Parable of the Great Feast is ultimately about life in heaven. It would be easy to conclude from the host's justifiable anger at the inconsiderate behavior and dismissive attitudes of those who were first invited to the dinner that God shows his anger toward those who decline his invitation to join him at the feast prepared for us in heaven by consigning them to hell. That would be the wrong conclusion!

The Parable of the Great Feast is less about God's anger than it is about his extravagant hospitality. Jesus paid the price of admission so the opportunity to "sit down at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven" is available to everyone. It's up to us to make the conscientious and freewill choice to take a seat at the table. And there are no really good excuses for not accepting the invitation.

Jesus paid the price of admission but our YES response to God's invitation to join him in heaven comes with the freedom to act accordingly. God has shown us extravagant hospitality and unconditional love...we need to show the same extravagant hospitality and love toward others. Saint John writes in today's Epistle reading..."Our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action."

Saint John tells us we know we are being truthful with God and ourselves when we take Jesus' commandment to love others as much as he loves us seriously. To love God is to love others is to love God and to work for the good of others. To love God is to show the same kind of humility and hospitality he shows toward us.

God has sent us an invitation: *We are invited to dine with him from now through all eternity. Believe in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And dine with Jesus as our host, and to live in heaven eternally.*

And when it comes to the best seats in heaven...they all are the best seats...they all come with us seeing God face to face...and there is plenty of room for everyone who wants a seat. There is no reason whatsoever not to RSVP God's invitation...Yes!

