

XVII Trinity 2024
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney

Ephesians 4.1-5 St. Luke 14.1-11



Our friend Paul urges us to live the life that measures up to the standard God set when he called us. What is that standard...?...

...We are to always be humble, gentle, and patient. We are to show our love by being tolerant of one another. We are not to argue with each other and do our best the unity we have with each other that binds us together by God's grace. We are always to remember there is one Lord, one Faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all mankind, who is Lord of all, works through all, and is in all.

Paul has given us a powerful message of how we are to live our lives as a community of believers bound by our love for each other. We need to pay attention to what he says.

Jesus often confronts the lawyers and religious leaders of his time with their misinterpretation and misapplication of the standards they expected the people who looked up to them to live by.

In this morning's Gospel, Jesus is having lunch with one of the leading Pharisees on the Sabbath Day. The Pharisee hadn't invited Jesus to his house because he wanted to be his friend. He was looking for a way to trick him into saying or doing something he could use against him. We're told the people were watching Jesus closely.

A man with swollen arms and legs (edema) came to Jesus for help. Jesus used this opportunity to first teach the people around him a lesson in hospitality and then in humility. He could just as easily have healed the man. Instead, he asked the religion teachers if it was OK to heal on the Sabbath Day.

Under their strict and literalistic interpretation of the Law, the religion teachers would have said "no". That would have made them look cruel and uncaring. If they said "yes", they would have looked like hypocrites for violating their own teachings. They didn't even try to answer Jesus. Jesus heals the man and sends him on his way. Lesson: Compassion and mercy are key ingredients in

hospitality. We're supposed to show them regardless of what day of the week it is. Luke's Gospel is all about Jesus showing God's hospitality by healing people.

Jesus then turns his attention to giving a lesson in humility. He tells a story about people at a dinner shoving each other out of the way to get a seat at the host's table. They wanted the best seats in the house because they thought they were better and more important than others. When we are invited to dinner it's always a treat to get seated next to the host. But we should wait to be asked. To do otherwise disrespects the host. Lesson: We can all learn to show more humility.

Father Massey Shepherd, author of the *Oxford Prayer Book Commentary*, explains what we should learn from the Gospel...

...“The people who think themselves important in the world may very well find that in the Kingdom of God their places of privilege will be taken by others who are not so self-centered and self-regarding.”

The Pharisee who invited Jesus to lunch thought he was better than everyone else. Jesus is critical of a certain type of behavior in this Pharisee, not all Pharisees. He was one himself. The Pharisee who tried to trap Jesus was more concerned about rules and regulations rather than hospitality, humility, compassion and mercy. He was not teaching the people to observe the Law about work on the Sabbath the way God intended.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus says the Sabbath was made for the good of man; man wasn't made for the Sabbath. There was a time not so long ago "blue laws" in many states forced stores to close on Sunday. Even the corner gas station was closed. Blue laws were intended to encourage people to go to church. They still exist today but in a more secular way.

Sometimes we have to work on Sunday to make ends meet. If we take what Jesus says in Mark's Gospel seriously, we know that's OK. But if we aren't working on Sunday, then attending Mass is a great idea. That's where we learn how to live the life that measures up to the standard God set when he called us to be the Church.

