

Whenever the Bible tells us something about what it means to be a Christian, it doesn't leave us in the dark trying to figure out for ourselves what that means. It always gives us very concrete, specific examples, so that we can learn what God is talking about. And that's what's happening in our Gospel lesson for today, in Luke chapter 14. Jesus is teaching us something about a very important Christian virtue, one that goes by many names, actually, in the Bible. Paul, in Galatians chapter 5, lists as one of the fruits of the spirit gentleness, being gentle with one another, being kind to one another, and not being vicious or harsh. And in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5, Jesus calls it meekness, when he says, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." And here in Luke chapter 14, Jesus calls it humility, to be humble before God and to be humble before men. And so if we want to learn what Christian humility looks like, we only have to listen to what Jesus has to teach us today.

Because Jesus in our reading for today is at a party. A very important party, actually. Because the Pharisee who invited him is called a leader of the Pharisees. This was a party of the well-to-do. Everybody who was somebody was at this party. And Jesus was invited by the Pharisee to come to this feast, probably because he had been preaching in the synagogue, like he usually does. And so the Pharisee, maybe to impress some people, to get this new hotshot preacher that they've heard so much about, invites Jesus to come and to be at the feast as well. But they're also watching him very carefully, because the Pharisees never do anything without a mixed reason in mind.

But during this party, after all of the talking and the drinking and the eating, there is an interruption, a very serious interruption. A sick man comes into their midst. Now, for the Pharisees, this is a real problem, because in their mind, if someone is sick, it's because they sinned. You only have to look to a passage like John with the man who was born blind. And they asked, "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born this way?" So this man who has come into their midst, being sick, they figure is a sinner. And for that reason, he is unclean. That means that he has ruined everything. This party might be able to be salvaged, but they've got to do something about it right now. That's why a debate breaks out. We're not given all the details of this debate, but we can probably guess at them. Because the main question at hand is what we do with this guy? The Pharisees probably started out by saying, "Get rid of him! Get him out of here! We don't want him here, because he's ruining everything. So maybe we can make the best of a bad situation if he just leaves." But Jesus says, "No, we should help this man. He needs our help. We should take care of him. That's what is the right thing to do here." But the Pharisees come back and say, "But it's the Sabbath! You're not supposed to heal people on the Sabbath. That's what we believe and that's what we argue for! You're doing something that is against the Law of God." But now we get Jesus's response here. Jesus asks them, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" Now, the Pharisees don't answer, either because they don't know what to say, or what's more likely, Jesus has got them in a corner. They know that he has them beat. And so Jesus does the only thing that should be done in this situation. He heals this man, heals him and sends him on his way.

Now, I think to understand what's going on here too, Christians, and so that we understand everything else that's going on in this passage, we have to understand what this man's problem was. The Bible tells us that he had dropsy. Now that's not a word we use anymore, but dropsy basically is retaining water. We call it by a different name these days. We call it edema. And

whenever this happens, it's because the body is holding onto its fluids and it's putting it into places where, frankly, it doesn't belong. And so you would tell that someone has dropsy by the fact that his limbs would be all swollen up, especially his hands, around his belly, and especially around his feet. The body was holding onto as much water as it could as part of this disorder. But we also know these days that edema or dropsy is not something that happens all on its own. It's usually a result of something else going wrong within the body. So usually like a disorder or a malfunctioning of the liver or the kidneys or even the heart. And as the body tries to compensate for this, it ends up putting all of this water and fluid into places where, frankly, it can't really use it, because the body can't use the water when it's stored up in the hands or in the feet. And that leads to something very unusual, kind of ironic even. Because the body is retaining water, but retaining it in a way that it can't use it, a man with dropsy actually becomes incredibly thirsty. He becomes dehydrated. Now, that might sound strange. He's retaining water. How could he become dehydrated? How is he thirsty? But that's exactly what's so strange about it. Because the body has put that fluid in a place where it can't use it, it needs more and more and more and more in an attempt to get the water that it needs. And so even in those times, the ancients had a saying, "As thirsty as a man with dropsy," a thirst which was never quenched, a thirst which never seemed to go away. And so that's what this man was struggling with. And so Jesus heals him. He takes care of what's going on in his body. We're not told exactly what. And he causes his dropsy to go away, so he's no longer retaining water, and he's no longer thirsty. Jesus has healed him, just as he said that he would.

Now, the reason why I went through all of that is because there is also a different kind of dropsy at work in this passage. The Pharisees have a spiritual dropsy, a spiritual disorder. They are thirsty for the attention of other people. They are thirsty for the honor of other men. And the underlying cause that has caused this spiritual thirst for them is their pride. Their pride, which causes them to look at this poor man and to despise him, to turn away from him, to not want anything to do with him, because he would wreck everything for us. And that's not what we want. And then with their thirst for the things of this world, they are constantly looking for attention from other people. That's why they sit in the best places in the house. Because where you sit said something about who you were and how important you were. So as long as you were in the right spot, seen by the right people, people would think a lot better of you.

But how often do we do the same, Christians? Who doesn't like to be noticed? Who doesn't like to be praised? Who doesn't like to get ahead in life, even if it means we have to step on somebody else in the process? Do we have a spiritual dropsy, a thirst for the things of this world? Jesus says that it is a product of pride, a product of a self-seeking pride which only looks out for the self and wants nothing to do with other people. If we think that way, unfortunately, we become no better than the Pharisees.

But Jesus shows us what true humility is. True humility, Jesus tells us, is first of all being content with what you have. You're at the lowest place at the table, yes, but you have a place at the table. That means something. To even be there in the first place is a great honor. And so why would we look around for something better, something more than what we have, thinking that we deserve more? God has given us so much already by bringing us to the table in the first place. And so to be humble, then, is to be content with the things that we already have.

Humility is also putting the needs of others before ourselves, just like Jesus did here in this reading. When he saw that poor man and helped him, even though it might mean that he would end up unclean himself, he helped him because that's what that man needed at that moment. Humility is looking out for the needs of each other and taking care of one another first, and then looking at the things of our own.

Humility is also letting other people praise us. I don't want you to think that humility means that we can never be praised for anything, as if it was always being down here in the dirt, and no one can say anything good about us ever. That's not what humility is. Humility is recognizing that our praise comes from the lips of others, and especially from the lips of God. When God calls to us, "Friend, come up higher," and honors us, then in humility we can come to him, knowing that he has done all of these things for us.

So then, Christians, how can we find this humility? How can we grow in this gift of God? The first thing we can do is look to Jesus, Jesus, who is our example. Because Jesus himself is the most humble of all, because he left heaven, came down to earth, and humbled himself to become one of us, even to the point of going to the cross. He could've stayed up in heaven, and he would've been right to do so. But he lowered himself for our sake, so that we might be saved. And so when we look to him and imitate him, we will know what it means to be humble. We can also look upward to God, and consider who God is in all of his glory and his majesty. And when we do that, we will see ourselves for who we are, small in comparison to the glory of God. And that will help us and teach us what it also means to be humble. And we can also look within to consider our own sin, the pride which we have expressed so many times, and confess that sin, because God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, from the pride which has plagued us. Yes, dear Christians, when we come to Christ and receive his gifts and hear his forgiveness, we will learn what it means to be humble.

So come this day. Come and receive the gifts of Christ. Imitate him who has become humble for us, and then we will know what it means to be humble before God and men.

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.