

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost 24 September 2017

“For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted.” Lk. 14:11

In today’s liturgy, we are given passages which celebrate the incredible riches flowing from the wisdom of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In the Epistle (*Ephesians* 3:13-21), St. Paul, although he is in chains in Rome, celebrates ***“the unfathomable riches of Christ.”*** Eph. 3:8 Today’s Gospel (*Luke* 14:1-11), describes the miraculous ability of Jesus to cure the man with dropsy and shows how Our Lord’s divine wisdom counteracts the pride of the Pharisees in the ***“Parable of Choosing the Lowest Place at Table.”*** Only divine wisdom could have challenged the Pharisees in their custom of choosing the first place for themselves at banquets. By telling them to humble themselves and pick the lowest place at table, Jesus rebukes them for their prideful attack on Him for curing the man of dropsy on the Sabbath. He also reveals their own covetousness for honours and esteem before men. In teaching them the need to be humble, Jesus reveals the importance of humility in order to enter the heavenly kingdom He has prepared for them. Earlier, in the first chapter of the *Epistle to the Ephesians*, St. Paul had extolled this wonderful plan of God for all mankind: ***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing on high in Christ. Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blemish in his sight in love.”*** Eph. 1: 3-4 In today’s Epistle, St. Paul praises the blessed calling of all Christians: ***“...and to have Christ dwelling through faith in your hearts: so that being rooted and grounded in love, you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know Christ’s love which surpasses knowledge, in order that you may be filled unto all fullness of God.”*** Eph. 3: 17-19

The Mystery of Christ Dwelling in Man

Dom Prosper Gueranger in his book, *The Liturgical Life Vol. 11* comments on the plenitude of God which is given to the soul who believes in Jesus Christ. Dom Gueranger comments on this calling: ***“The wedding spoken of in today’s Gospel is that of heaven, of which there is a prelude given here below, by the union effected in the sacred banquet of Holy Communion. The***

divine invitation is made to all; and the invitation is not like that which is given on the occasion of earthly weddings, to which the bridegroom and bride invite their friends and relatives as simple witnesses to the union contracted between two individuals. In the Gospel wedding, Christ is the Bridegroom, and the Church is the bride (cf. Apoc. 19:7).... But, for the attainment of all this—that is, that our Lord Jesus Christ may have that full control over the soul and its powers which makes her to be truly His, and subjects her to Him as the bride to her Spouse (cf. I Cor. 11:8-10) – it is necessary that all alien competition be entirely and definitively put aside.” Gueranger, p. 365.

Loss of Spiritual Ardour

In today’s Gospel, we see how Jesus stresses the importance of seeking God alone and not the honours of men in order to attain divine union. In a dramatic manner, as the Pharisees watch Him to see if He will break the Sabbath by curing the man with dropsy, Jesus not only cures the man, but He reveals the serious sickness in the souls of the Pharisees. According to Dom Gueranger, quoting St. Ambrose, the man with dropsy represents ***“a morbid exuberance of humours, which stupefy the soul, and induce total extinction of spiritual ardour.”*** Gueranger, p. 367-6 Ven. Bede also shows that this loss of spiritual ardour is caused by lustful desires: ***“The dropsical man represents one who is weighed down by an overflowing stream of carnal pleasures, for it is a sickness named after the watery humour. But specifically the dropsical man is the covetous rich man who, the more he abounds in riches, the more ardently desires them, says St. Augustine.”*** *The Commentary of Cornelius a Lapide*, p. 540 Jesus cures the dropsical man of his covetousness for this world’s goods so that he can seek the riches of God. In reading the minds of the Pharisees, He also shows how His cure is just exactly what everyone else would do: ***“Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fall into a pit, and will not immediately draw him up on the Sabbath.”*** Lk. 14: 5. The pride of the Pharisees has blinded them so that they condemn Jesus for delivering a man from sickness, even though they themselves would do the same for one of their own animals, let alone for a suffering human being.

“...he who humbles himself shall be exalted.”
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Dom Gueranger commenting on the evil attitude of the Pharisees tells us of the importance

of humility if we are going to be accepted in the heavenly feast as Christ's bride: **"But, as above all, it is to the constant attitude of humility that he must especially direct his attention who would secure a prominent place in the divine feast of the nuptials."** Gueranger, p. 366 Jesus had spoken of the *"Parable of the First Seats at Table"* to show that the Pharisees are ambitious and proud to presume to take the first places at a wedding banquet. **"Now Christ demonstrates how unbecoming it is to vie for the first seat at table, and thereby he silently demonstrates, by way of analogy, how unbecoming ambition is in any matter whatsoever. For sin continues to be sin, although the matter may differ from one case to the next."** A Lapide, p. 341-2. Although Jesus is commenting on the ambition of seeking the first place, He is primarily teaching us all that the only way to the heavenly banquet table is one of humility. *"For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted."* Lk. 14:11 Those who wrongfully desire the praise of men will not be worthy to enter the heavenly banquet as brides of Christ.

Addendum

"The Little Number of Those Who Are Saved"

by St. Leonard of Port Maurice

Saint Leonard of Port Maurice was a most holy Franciscan friar who lived at the monastery of Saint Bonaventure in Rome. He was one of the greatest missionaries in the history of the Church. He used to preach to thousands in the open square of every city and town where the churches could not hold his listeners. So brilliant and holy was his eloquence that once when he gave a two weeks' mission in Rome, the Pope and College of Cardinals came to hear him. The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and the veneration of the Sacred Heart of Jesus were his crusades. He was in no small way responsible for the definition of the Immaculate Conception made a little more than a hundred years after his death. He also gave us the Divine Praises, which are said at the end of Benediction. But Saint Leonard's most famous work was his devotion to the Stations of the Cross. He died a most holy death in his seventy-fifth year, after twenty-four years of uninterrupted preaching.

One of Saint Leonard of Port Maurice's most famous sermons was *"The Little Number of Those Who Are Saved."* It was the one he relied on for the conversion of great sinners. This sermon, like his other writings, was submitted to canonical examination during the process of canonization. In it he reviews the various states of life of Christians and concludes with the little number of those who are saved, in relation to the totality of men.

The reader who meditates on this remarkable text will grasp the soundness of its argumentation, which has earned it the approbation of the Church. Here is the great missionary's vibrant and moving sermon. (to be continued next and subsequent weeks)