

**Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
Year C. September 2**

Theme: Why are they coming to dinner?

How could it possibly be in the self-interest of a leading Pharisee, as the Gospel of Luke described him, to invite poor people, the lame, the blind and cripples to his dinner parties?

The whole point of a dinner party was to have an enjoyable evening with family and friends or to network with business associates.

So why go to the expense and trouble of a dinner party with people he did not know and who could do him no earth good whatsoever?

Beside he didn't personally know any poor people, lame and cripple and blind folks, apart from a few beggars to whom he occasionally gave a few coins.

As a leading Pharisee, Jesus' host was likely a businessman or trades person or landowner and as such his social circle would not have included the sorts of people being suggested for the guest list of his next dinner.

Besides, they were officially unclean, not the sort of people most good Jews really wanted in his or her home anyway.

And this bit of Jesus teaching need not be read back to his time two millennia ago:

When was the last time any one of us gave a banquet or had a dinner party and invited **“the poor, the lame, the cripple and the blind”** instead of our families and wealthy neighbors?

When have we even shared a meal with such people - and note Jesus doesn't just say pay for the poor to eat something (e.g., give to the Community Bread Basket or Table of Hope), but to sit down at table and break bread with them, talk with them?

Jesus appears to have more in mind in this Gospel than simply a back handed way of feeding the hungry - again he doesn't just say invite hungry people to eat or give them some of the food from your banquet table, but to invite them to eat with you.

In addition to the sharing of food could Jesus be trying break down social and class and communication barriers over the dinner table?

The leading Pharisee and the lame and crippled of Galilee did not talk with one another any more than the members of Chamber of Commerce and someone receiving an SSI disability check (our politically correct term for the lame and crippled) do today.

Both travelled in different economic and social circles.

Perhaps Jesus was suggesting:

What would happen if the Chamber invited a couple people on SSI disability to come to their next dinner meeting and talk about what it's like to be physically disabled in this culture and to live on a disability check.

Perhaps Jesus was saying that the Professional Women's Club or even our own Christian Mother's asking to dinner some of the poor single mothers raising children by themselves who live around us to come and talk about what it's like living on so called "welfare" and food stamps, trying to find child care and holding down a part time, minimum wage job.

Apparently in Jesus' day as in our own, middle and upper social classes – leading Pharisees -- had little opportunity for sustained interaction with each other.

Thus, there would have been then as there are now few if any opportunities for communication and mutual sharing of lives.

Given the Pharisee's greater access to resources Jesus challenged him to use those resources more wisely than he had and to take the first step and invite **"the poor, the lame, the cripple and the blind"** to dinner.

In addition to breaking down the social barrier, Jesus also no doubt wanted to remind the Pharisee - and obviously by extension all of us -- that just because a person is poor or cripple or lame or blind does not mean they are less than human or of lesser value than the rich or stupid.

Poverty is an economic condition and disability a physical or mental limitation: neither impact basic human dignity and worth.

The poor and the disabled have much wisdom to contribute, and a viewpoint not available to those blessed with riches and full ability.

Their opinions matter.

They may not be dismissed as irrelevant.

Jesus reminds us today that -- as children of God like the leading Pharisee, like we ourselves -- the **"poor, the cripple, the lame and the blind"** are also entitled to a place at the table.

To make this last point even more strongly, let me share with you a poem by a man named George McPhee.

George grew up a poor dirt farmer in Jamaica.

When he was twenty he was diagnosed with Hansen's disease (leprosy) and, because treatment options were so scared and rudimentary back then, he was separated from his family and housed in a leprosy colony.

His face and hands were grotesquely disfigured and he went blind; eventually the colony was closed and George was homeless.

Finally he was taken in by St. Monica's Home of the Abandoned Elderly.

His poem appears in a book with a title appropriate for today's Gospel: "All You Really Need To Know About Prayer You Can Learn From The Poor."

Drinking from a Saucer

I have never made a fortune, and it's probably too late now.
I don't worry about that much, I'm happy anyhow.
As I go along life's journey, reaping more than I have sowed,
I'm drinking from a saucer, 'cause my cup has over-flowed.

I don't have lots of riches, and sometimes the going is tough.
I have a family that loves me, and that is quite enough.
I thank God for his blessings and his mercies he's bestowed.
I'm drinking from a saucer, 'cause my cup has over-flowed.

I remember times when things went wrong, my faith got a little thin.
Then all at once the dark clouds broke, and the sun peeked through
again.
Lord, please help me not to gripe about the tough rows I have hoed.
I'm drinking from a saucer, 'cause my cup has over-flowed.

If God gives me strength and courage when my way grows steep and tough,
I'll not ask for other blessings. I'm already blessed enough.
May I never be too busy to help another bear his load.
I'll keep drinking from a saucer, 'cause my cup has over-flowed.

GEORGE MCPHEE

In All You Really Need To Know About Prayer You Can Learn From The Poor ed. by Louise Perrotta (Servant Publications, Ann Arbor, Michigan) 1996, pages 165-166

