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Genuine and just relationships

For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. (Lk. 14:11)

The Gospels often indicate that Jesus was happy to accept an invitation to share a meal with other people: such occasions were times of encounter, opportunities to make friends and to consolidate relationships. In this passage from Luke's Gospel, Jesus observes the behaviour of the guests: there is a race to occupy the best places that are reserved for dignitaries; the anxious desire to affirm social status is palpable. He is thinking about another banquet that will be offered to all the children in the Father's house: it will be offered to people who do not have "acquired rights" because of their alleged superiority. Indeed, the best places will be reserved for those who put themselves last, in service of others. That is why he proclaims:

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By making ourselves the centre of attention - with our greed, our pride, our demands, and complaints - we fall into the temptation of idolatry, that is, of worshipping false gods, who do not deserve honour and trust. Therefore, the first thing Jesus seems to be asking us is to come down from the "pedestal" of our ego and to make God himself - and not ourselves - the focus of attention in life. God has the place of honour! It is important to make room for him, to deepen our relationship with him and to learn from him the evangelical attitude of putting ourselves in the last place. In fact, to do so is to choose the place that God himself has chosen, in Jesus. Although he is the Lord, he has chosen to share the human condition and to proclaim the Father's love to everyone.

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This is also a lesson where we learn how to build fraternity: we learn to contribute to forming a community of men and women, adults and children, healthy and sick who are capable of building bridges and serving the common good. Like Jesus, we can approach each neighbour without fear, we can walk side by side during both difficult and joyful times; we can value his or her qualities, share material and spiritual goods, encourage, give hope and forgive. We will attain the primacy of charity and freedom of the children of God. In a world that is so sick because desire for personal success has led to a breakdown of society,

behaving in this way means really going against the tide: it is an entirely evangelical revolution. This is the law of the Christian community as the apostle Paul wrote: "In humility value others above yourselves."ⁱ

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As Chiara Lubich wrote: *"Do you notice? In the world everything has a completely different order. The law of the ego prevails ... And we know the painful consequences ... injustice and prevarication of every kind. However, Jesus does not focus directly on these forms of abuse but turns his thought to the human heart, the root from which they arise. ... Our hearts must be transformed if we are to acquire new attitudes and establish genuine and just relationships. To be humble does not only mean not being ambitious and dominant, it also means being aware of our own nothingness, feeling small before God and thus placing ourselves in his hands, like children. How can we be humble? By doing as Jesus did and acting out of love for our brothers and sisters. God considers that whatever we do to others is done to him. Therefore, it's a matter of putting ourselves in a lower place and serving them. ... And we will certainly be exalted in the next world, in the other life. This reversal of situations is already present in the Church: in fact, whoever commands must be a servant to others. Situations, therefore, are already changed. If these words that we have studied so carefully are lived out, the Church is already a sign of the world to come"*.ⁱⁱ

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ⁱ cf. Phil.2:3

ⁱⁱ C. Lubich Word of Life Oct 1995