

VESPERS HOMILY  
3 SEPTEMBER 2017

LUKE 14: 1, 7-14  
PSALM 112

IN THE NAME OF GOD, FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT

Luke introduces this passage as a Parable, but of course it isn't. If it were a parable it would most often be a story concerning a protagonist, someone embarrassing himself at a dinner party, for whom a moral lesson would be made.

This is what the Old Testament would call "Wisdom Literature." In fact it is very nearly a direct quote from the book of Proverbs, specifically Chapter 25: verses 6 and 7.

"Claim not honor in the presence of the king, nor stand in the place of greatness. It is better for you to be told "Come up thither" than to be humbled before the Noble."

Proverbs, with Job, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Solomon and some of the Psalms are the body of Old Testament Literature known as Wisdom. They are what in Hebrew are called "Hohkmah," pragmatic, secular, practical guidance from God, Yahweh.

They speak of what comprises a "Well ordered moral and religious life." They told people how to live as God would have them live, including good table manners as Luke tells us. Actually, they were common to most cultures in the ancient Middle East, one culture sharing them with others.

In Proverbs 25: 6 and 7, we find the rules of etiquette for a guest that Luke, with some interpretation, has Jesus say to his host, a significant person, a Pharisee. It does seem unlikely that Luke would include a lesson in table manners in his Gospel.

That does seem to be rather atypical of the words attributed to Jesus. Perhaps that is because we have come to see Jesus as a prophet or a religious figure. Actually, to his contemporaries he was probably neither; he was a “wise man.”

What exactly was, or is, a wise man? They are not to be confused with the Magi, travelers from the East appearing in Bethlehem in Jesus’ Nativity story.

The Wise men were one of the three groups that molded the cultural life of Israel in Jesus’ time; prophets, priests, and wise men.

The first two were far more prominent; the history of Israel that we know as the Old Testament was written from a prophetic or priestly point of view.

The wise men did not speak with the authority of the prophets, “Thus sayeth the Lord,” or with the Temple piety of the Priests. They were earnest seekers of the “good Life” whose popular style and genial manners attracted large numbers of the common people.

The wise men worked and thought individually. They were the ones at the village gates, accessible to everyone, giving their counsel to everyone or to individuals, giving instruction gratis. They were accessible to all, the mighty and the humble, the rich and the poor. They were, above all, the ones who shaped the lives and the faith of the people of ancient Israel.

Jesus was, and is, far more than a wise man. He is God incarnate present with, and speaking to, us, His creation. He speaks to each of us, to all no matter who or where we are, no matter where we are seated at the table, with guidance and wisdom.

That is a fair description of Jesus.

IN HIS HOLY NAME.