

**St Michael and All Angels**

**Ōtautahi / Christchurch**

**31 August 2025 / 22nd Sunday Ordinary Time**

**Homily**

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**Luke 14:1,7-14 NRSVUE**

- 1 On one occasion, when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching him closely...
- 7 When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honour, he told them a parable.
- 8 “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host,
- 9 and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then, in disgrace, you would start to take the lowest place.
- 10 But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at the table with you.
- 11 For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”
- 12 He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers and sisters or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid.
- 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.
- 14 And you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

## Opening Story

“When you attend an event, do not sit in the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited, because you will be asked to move to make room for them. Instead, when you are invited, sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes, they may say to you, ‘Friend, come and sit with me; then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.’”

Growing up as a child and through my adult years, my family was blessed with a very close relationship with another family. My parents and the other couple had known each other since their early twenties; they took many holidays together, and much of their free time was spent in various activities and daily life together. As a result, the two families grew very close, with the children from both families treating each other like siblings. My parents’ friends became like a close aunt and uncle to me. One day, after a long illness, the father of the other family died; his funeral was to be held midweek at the Beckenham Methodist Church.

I worked in the central city, so I allowed myself plenty of time to get to the service. However, even though I had arrived early, the church was close to full, and rather than looking for a suitable place to sit with other people I knew. And not wanting to cause any disruption or draw attention to myself, I decided to slip through the back of the church into the side annexe, which they had opened up for overflow seating.

As I sat quietly, a figure approached and stood beside me. Very firmly, the figure said, “What are you doing sitting here?” When I looked up, I saw that it was the family’s daughter standing by me. “What do you mean?” I replied. She said, “You shouldn’t be sitting here in the back room. Come with me.” The daughter took my hand, led me past the many people gathered, and seated me in the front row with the rest of her family. I was deeply honoured and genuinely moved by her gesture of acceptance and welcome.

As a result of that experience, today's gospel has become one of my most beloved pieces of Holy Scripture. Not only because it holds deep theological mysteries, but because it demonstrates with perfect clarity the truth contained in Christ's parables. As such, Christ's stories are universal, they are practical, and remain relevant today.

### **God is the true host**

In today's gospel reading from Luke and my retelling of a personal story, a consistent theme emerges in both. This theme asserts that only the host can exalt. In my story, it was the daughter, the host, who approached me and said, "Why are you seated in the lowest place? Friend, come with me, move up higher." Had I tried to exalt myself by assuming to sit with the family, it could have ended in public humiliation, as our gospel states, "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." However, due to the character of the host alone, my story was enveloped in love, charity, and grace.

In today's gospel, it is the host who elevates the characters in Christ's parable, and therefore, the true host in Christ's narrative is God. In all things, God is the true host and the only one who exalts. This cosmic reality is not limited to you and me; instead, the power of God to exalt reaches its fullness in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Consequently, after his death, Jesus was raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit, and his ascension into heaven is an event often seen as God's ultimate act of exaltation. The author of Philippians writes, "God exalted Jesus even more highly and gave him the name that is above every other name, so that at the name given to Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth."<sup>1</sup>

Based on the gospel reading and my story. I would like to think that we are reminded that 'to be exalted, to be lifted up,' is never something we should pursue for ourselves, as it is always a gift bestowed by the host. Our role, then,

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 2:9-10

is to embrace humility by avoiding the pursuit of recognition and status and to trust in God's provision and goodness.

### **Grace is the new currency**

Further to our reflection, Luke's reading offers us themes of an invitation to a banquet where each guest will "be honoured in the presence of all who sit at the table with them." Once again, recognising God as the true host, our reading highlights a eucharistic pattern within the text.

As such, in contrast to the Greco-Roman feasting tradition, where an invitation and seating determined your societal status and assured the host that favours would be repaid. Luke's reading points to the Church, which invites and gathers those unable to repay God's love and mercy. Thus, God is the host who overturns human rankings, and God's Kingdom breaks the cycle of payback, as grace becomes the new currency, for in God's new kingdom, all are welcomed, seated, and honoured by the one true host who alone exalts.

Today's gospel calls us to rest in the truth that our worth is not measured by status or how society sees and interprets our value. Instead, it is God who sees us, welcomes us, and gives us a place of honour at the holy table of the Eucharist, which Jesus prepared in love.

Therefore, as we live in humility and open our lives to others, especially those who cannot return any favours, we glimpse the very heart of God's kingdom, where mercy reshapes every invitation and grace is the only foundation of the coming new kingdom.

Amen