

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)
August 31, 2025
“Divine Seating Arrangements”

The first day of school can be both exciting and nerve-wracking. Middle schoolers, for example, walk into the cafeteria at lunch time and look around, trying to determine where their friends are sitting, or least friendly-looking people are eating. They are trying to determine their place on the social ladder. This practice continues in high school, but social orders do not disappear when we leave school. They are present in workplaces, social gatherings, and even Church events.

Today’s Gospel could be divided into two parts: one part is about **guests**. Our Lord offers a parable, urging his followers to resist the urge to go higher, and instead take a lower position. His message would be repeated by Saint James who told his readers to make no distinctions among themselves, “*and become judges with evil designs*” (2:5).

What does it look like to allow others to have a better place than you? What does it look like when someone shows up on Sunday morning and takes “your pew”? How do you feel?

Then there is a part about **hosts**. Our Lord is challenging hosts to expand their guest lists. “*Do not invite your relatives or friends, those who might invite you in return and repay the favor.*” Instead, invite the poor and crippled, the blind and lame.

A college professor wrote: “In urban Roman culture, patronage and status [was] everything. From how you dressed to how you present yourself, there [was] a clear demarcation of where you belong. So if you were invited to a party, it’s not like you were going to look at the chairs and say, ‘I wonder where I’m going to sit.’ You knew right away who you are and where you were to sit.”

Challenging the *status quo* is part of the Christian life. Inviting everyone to the table will absolutely change the dynamics of a meal, but it will allow a richness of diversity, a wealth of gifts, and a breadth of fellowship to emerge. Most importantly, a universal invitation to a banquet will reflect the Kingdom of God.

A winter storm once forced some seminary students to stay in their residence halls over Christmas break. Instead of remaining in their rooms, students gathered for a prayer service. Afterwards, they came together for a hastily prepared potluck that included canned fruit and Ramen noodles, a loaf of bread with jam, and other food items. Someone even brought hot chocolate packets. One student summed up the day: "It was weird, but it was also wonderful because though none of us had a lot of food, or even food that made much sense together, we were all fed by the meal and nourished by the company. *It was fellowship.*"

Serving God and neighbor is more like a community potluck rather than a gourmet meal. Teacher Sharron Blezard wrote: "It is less about perfection and more about improvisation. It is less about form and more about function. It is less about looks and more about love. Instead of *a guest list* carefully crafted to reflect our wishes, Jesus crafts *a grace list* or an open invitation to the party. . . . At Our Lord's table, there is room for everyone: Great Aunt Mabel's lime Jello salad can exist peacefully with vegan Val's fresh green bean vinaigrette. Homemade mac and cheese can sit by side with a bag of store-bought potato chips. Hamburgers, tamales, and snow cones can coexist and complement one another. When we all show up, the banquet table groans with the goodness of God."

In the months and years ahead, we will all be challenged to leave our comfort zones and create new faith communities. We will be called by the Holy Spirit to forgo social conventions and pecking orders so that all our brothers and sisters in Christ will be able to partake fully of God's grace in the Eucharistic sacrifice. In Eucharist, we are all honored guests, regardless of bank balance, occupation, social status, or farm acreage.

The message of the Gospel is to learn to see yourself and your neighbor as God sees them, men and women made in his image and likeness, and called to full communion in the Church. The last, the lost, and the lonely were once invited to Communion at an altar rail in Catholic churches; today we are invited to form a soup kitchen-style line because we are all beggars at the feet of the Savior.

Mary, Mother of the Eucharist, welcome us to the table of God. God bless you.