

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

One of my favourite sung graces that we have learned at some of my family gatherings begins with the words “Be present at our table Lord, be here and everywhere adored...” But in light of our Gospel for today, I wonder if this is a very wise thing to pray for. Do we really want Jesus to come to our dinner table? Let’s face it, Jesus was not always the most pleasant of dinner guests.

According to our text, Jesus had been invited by a leader of the Pharisees to join him and his friends for a Sabbath dinner. When Jesus shows up, he notices how the other invited guests had chosen the seats of honour around the dinner table, sitting close to the host. Perhaps these persons had been invited to this leader’s home for dinner before, and assumed that they might well be granted those seats, as they had in the past. Our text doesn’t say.

But no sooner does Jesus enter the dining room than he tears into those who are seated at the table. He tells them, via a parable, that when they are invited to a banquet, they should not seek the positions of honour, in case the host had invited someone more distinguished and honoured than they, to be his guest. In that case, they would be disgraced when the host asked them to give their seat to the more honoured guest. Rather, Jesus suggests that they should humble themselves and assume the lowest seat at the table, and if the host asked them to move closer to him, they would be honoured.

Of course, had these guests realized that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God, they most certainly would have made room for him. But they didn’t know the true identity of Jesus. Nor did the host, whom we are told, invite Jesus in order to watch this young itinerant preacher closely, perhaps to find some fault that would enable them to dismiss his teachings. And before the meal is even served, Jesus has given the other guests plenty to talk about, as he called on them to humble themselves.

“Be present at our table, Lord” Luke 14:1-11 Justus Es Domine 2025

“Be present at our table, Lord.” Is that not also what we pray will happen when we enter this building to worship on our Sabbath and gather around our Lord’s table? Here, too, as guests of our Lord, we should assume the posture of humility as we take our seats for worship. From my vantage point, it is easy to notice that many of you, week after week, assume the same pews for worship. I don’t have a problem with this, as long as we don’t come to feel entitled to those seats.

“Be present at our table, Lord.” Not only did Jesus lay into the guests who had assumed for themselves positions of honour, but he also challenged the host who had invited him. He said to the host, “When you give a dinner, do not invite your friends, relatives, and rich neighbours, who will be able to return the favour and invite you to dine with them. But when you give a meal, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind, who most likely will not be able to repay your hospitality. In doing this, you will be blessed at the resurrection of the righteous.”

Of course, this also may be a word to host about honouring Jesus as a guest. In his youth, Jesus was trained in Joseph’s occupation as a carpenter. But throughout the Gospels, I am not aware of any passage that indicates that Jesus ever plied his trade to earn the money to support himself or his disciples during the three years of his ministry. As some commentaries pointed out, Jesus and his disciples must have lived as beggars, as they travelled from town to town.

“Be present at our table, Lord.” Dr. Thomas Long, who is a distinguished professor of preaching at Emory, says that he grew up in a small community church in rural Georgia. Most of the farmers, shopkeepers and their families who attended this church were just everyday, ordinary people. Yet Dr. Long remembers one Sunday morning, when something happened at worship that challenged the faith of that congregation.

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While they were in worship, a stranger appeared, walking in the side door.

Judging from his clothes and appearance, he probably had wandered over from the railroad tracks, the people figured. He was perhaps one of the drifters who rode the rails. Perhaps he was someone who had come in off the highway, just passing through.

The stranger simply walked in and walked past the preacher and the congregation in the middle of the Sunday sermon. The congregation all looked at the man, and he looked back at them. The preacher even stopped his sermon and stared at the man. The man did not take a seat; he was not offered a seat. The man spoke not a word, and not a word was spoken to him. He simply looked out across the congregation, paused for a few moments, and walked out the door on the opposite side of the nave. The preacher then collected himself, and he continued with his sermon.

But after church that day, Dr. Long says, members of the congregation gathered around the base of the big oak tree that was out in front of the church building. They gathered there for some time and discussed what had happened. In fact, for the next two or three Sundays, they gathered out under the oak tree after the service and continued their discussion.

They never knew who that stranger was, and they never saw him again. But according to Dr. Long, the congregation believed that God had put before them a kind of moral test. And they had flunked. They had their opportunity to stand up and be faithful and show hospitality to the stranger, the same sort of hospitality that had been shown to them by God, and they failed the test. Isn't every congregation measured to a great extent by its ability to receive the stranger?

“Be present at our table, Lord.” To invite Jesus to be present at our table, even if it is in our homes for a simple meal with our family, or a feast in which we

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invite friends and neighbours, calls into question our motives for the gathering.
Throughout Luke’s Gospel, meals were occasions for celebrating the presence of
God in our midst and acknowledging God’s redeeming grace among us.

That is even more accentuated when we gather around our Lord’s table
during worship. This is when we expect our Lord’s presence to be among us, to
guide us and lead us into what it means to be his disciples. It is easy for us to
become complacent, to assume our place at his table as if we have a rightful place
at the head table, because we have dined with him for years. And yet, if we truly
think about the fact that we are not worthy to enter this feast, without the
redeeming grace of God, poured out for us in Christ’s death and resurrection, can
we not humble ourselves to welcome the stranger who may come as a disruption
to our feast?

Should we not welcome the unworthy to dine with us at our Lord’s table, be
they the poor, the crippled, the lame or the blind, as Jesus mentioned, or any
other person who does not seem to measure up to the status of the usual guests
we might expect to attend the feast to which we have been invited? May God’s
Spirit so open our minds to truly invite our Lord to be present at our table. Amen.