

22nd Sunday 2016

Question. When you come to Xavier for Sunday Mass, do you always try to sit in the same seat? One of the things I noted over many years of being pastor at St Ignatius was that the regulars pretty much always sat in the same seats in the church. So much so that if I were looking for someone I knew where to look and I was shocked if I saw them on the opposite side of the church or in the back when they were usually in the front. There's something about us that gravitates to the same place whether in church or at the table. (or is it just the we are creatures of habit?)

If this were a church where the theme of the homily were on a sign outside, it would be "Know your Place" But what would the punctuation be? A Question mark? Or an exclamation point!

If we're talking about the Gospel today, there would be an exclamation point. The point that Jesus is making is that you may have such a high opinion of yourself that you're going to be embarrassed when you find out you're not so important after all. You may be filled with pride and self-esteem thinking that you really are someone special and then you are "put in your place". Have you ever gone to a reception and assumed that you would be at a table near the front and find that you are at a table in another room, about as far away from the center of attention as possible.

Jesus warns us not to have such an "inflated" sense of self, for someone may come along and "deflate" us.

Know your place with a question mark. Know your place? Sirach speaks of humility which is all about knowing your place in relationship to God and others. This is not a false humility that pretends to be less than you are but it's a capacity for genuine self-gift, for service.

So Know your place! Or Know your place? What are you hearing today? Is there something that God's word is saying to you?

Speaking for myself I've felt so small and insignificant since I've been here. Small in comparison to everything here that is so grand! In the mornings I sit outside praying on the patio of the community and I look up through the trellis at this great building soaring into the sky. It makes me feel so small. Every time I walk into this church and see its grandeur and beauty, I feel so small. And when I walk on the streets of NY as one person amidst so many, many of God's children, I feel so insignificant. Who am I in the midst of so many?

But here I am dressed in all these fine robes, with the place of honor in the sanctuary and I know that it's only because I have an "assigned" seat. It's not a matter of a "higher" place at the table but really the most humbling of places because it's about vulnerability and service. In some sense, Jesus has asked me to take his place in the midst of this assembly. I know I'm only a place holder and not the "real thing".

I know that many of you saw the film Ignacio de Loyola this past weekend which is a moving and graphic description of Ignatius "before" and "after" his conversion. In his "before", he's prouder than proud, with a self-inflated ego. He thinks he's capable of winning battles and wooing women of every station. There is not a humble bone in his body. But after he is wounded every bone in his body, especially his shattered leg will remind him painfully that he is no longer what he thought. And in the "after" he still has a similar pride in his penances. His ego is still inflated but now with a sense of his sinfulness. "I am the best sinner or worst sinner in the world. It's all the same. It will take him some time and many more changes of heart to 'know his place". And what is that place? It is very simply. With Jesus as companion and friend. There is a famous scene in the life of Ignatius. In a chapel in La Storta on the way to Rome he asks for the grace to be with Jesus. His words: Place me with your son" It is where he belongs.

It is where we all belong. In a place with Jesus. Today it's around the this table and no matter where we are seated, we are his friends who gather to receive him and the friendship of each other.

I would be remiss if I didn't say that the true preaching and living of this Gospel is downstairs this morning and every Sunday here at Xavier in

the service of the Welcome Table. Here you see the Gospel and not just hear it!