



A Place for Generosity

In just a few days, we will return to the normal rhythm of our lives. We always pay close attention to the quality of our relationships. While a focus on team productivity and stability may impose limitations on creativity, we usually plan our lives in anticipation of what we expect to happen in the coming months.

It is wise to use foresight and practice moderation in our relationships. Besides being an indication of maturity, this strategy helps to maintain a peaceful environment in our personal space. But at the same time, if we were to weigh *every* word and calculate *every* move, there would be no spontaneity in our lives. There is little interest in establishing purely utilitarian relationships. Joy, poetry and inspiration are stifled when a *return on investment* is our sole guideline.

These reflections on how we conduct our lives enable us to appreciate the revolutionary ideas that Jesus proposed to the people of his era. They lived in a poor rural society which did not encourage generosity. Confined to their parcel of land or their fishing area, Jesus' contemporaries would need to be cautious and calculating. Any generous act would happen with the expectation that something similar would be done in return. Marriages were economic alliances between families and not based on couples falling in love.

In this social context, the seating plan at a festive meal would be an overt manifestation of the hierarchy of relationships. Each place had a symbolic value which reflected a host's evaluation of the guest's importance. Each guest would expect to be assigned a place that corresponded to his *worth*. Jesus warned his listeners to be cautious and not automatically take a *better seat*. Their haste could lead to the embarrassment of being asked to step down to a less prestigious place. It would be preferable to be invited by the host to move *up* to a better seat and have their importance acknowledged by the other guests. Jesus' comments were well understood because they reflected the current wisdom of his era.

On the other hand, Jesus' proposal to the person who invited him to his home was revolutionary. He questioned the concept of *giving only when one could expect something in return* in an era of economic poverty. To find happiness by giving something to people who could not possibly return the favor was disconcerting but it said much about God's generosity and provided a perspective on eternity.

Before we return to our daily grind this autumn, let's remember what we have learned. The best way to imitate the Gospel lesson proclaimed today is to invest in our own goodness and generosity... without any expectations. This requires that we place our confidence in God, the Source and Origin of generosity.

Alain Faucher, priest

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