

GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER?



Instead of continuing our bimonthly meetings during the summer, our Small Christian Community instead decided to accommodate our scattered summer schedules by deciding to gather for an occasional dinner. The importance of sitting around a table for dinner was highlighted by the observation that many of the stories in the Gospels happened around a meal.

We have a meal in today's Gospel reading. Jesus, his mother and his disciples are at a wedding reception at Cana. Jesus was an invited guest at the wedding and presumably he was not given a choice of whom would sit next to him at table. While many of us

would cringe when learning that the only available seat was next to someone we would rather avoid, Jesus welcomed everyone. The way Jesus treated people is to be considered an essential element of Jesus' method of evangelizing.

Jesus was able to welcome everyone, without distinction, and never exclude anyone: first, the poor, then the rich like Zacchaeus and Joseph of Arimathea; outsiders like the centurion and the Syro-Phoenician woman; the righteous, like Nathanael; and prostitutes and public sinners with whom he also sat at table.

When I host a dinner party I invite only the guests my wife and I enjoy. At cocktail parties an essential skill is knowing how to excuse oneself from one conversation and moving to another with the greatest of tact. I admit that, unlike Jesus, I must remind myself to welcome everyone and treat all without distinction. It is human nature to exclude those who are unlike us in social class, interests, and political and cultural opinions. It is human nature but as Christians we strive for better.

Paul makes no attempt to minimize the differences between people; we are not admonished to ignore the dissimilarities between us. Instead Paul enjoins us to celebrate our diversity as unique gifts bestowed upon us by the Holy Spirit. ("To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit.")

Imagine the exhilarating discussion at your dinner table if guests were not identical in thought and social stature, but instead added a unique perspective to the conversation: (using Paul's list) the expression of wisdom, the expression of knowledge, faith; gifts of healing, mighty deeds, prophecy, discernment of spirits, varieties of tongues, and interpretation of tongues.

I am a white, middle-class male. Let's say that my dinner parties are characterized not by the unique gifts of the Spirit but by a diversity of upbringing and perspective. Who sits at my table?

January 6-12, 2013 is National Migration Week. This year's theme is "We are Strangers No Longer: Our Journey of Hope Continues." This theme reminds us of our responsibility as Catholics to help newcomers integrate in ways that are respectful, culturally sensitive and responsive to social needs, and of the ongoing need for comprehensive and compassionate immigration reform.

On Monday January 21 we honor Martin Luther King and his nonviolent efforts to reverse racial discrimination. The U.S. Catholic Bishops wrote that "[Racism] mocks the words of Jesus: 'Treat others the way you would have them treat you.' Indeed, racism is more than a disregard for the words of Jesus; it is a denial of the truth of the dignity of each human being revealed by the mystery of the Incarnation" (*Pastoral Letter on Racism, 1979*).

January 22, 2013 marks the 40th anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision in Roe v. Wade.

Who sits at our table? Envision a dinner party where the guests are immigrants new to the United States, their comfort with the English language is hesitant, guests are black, guests are Catholics whose passion is ending poverty, Catholics whose passion is volunteering at a food pantry, and Catholics called to end government-supported abortion.

Perhaps because we are human we can't imagine such a dinner party. Jesus, however, would welcome all as children of God. Wonderful things happen around a meal as we break bread.



Office of Life, Justice, and Peace