

A Blind Drive to the Top Twenty-second Week in Ordinary Time/C August 28, 2016
5:00 PM Vigil Mass Sir 3:17-18, 20, 28-29; Heb 12:18-19, 22-24a; **Lk 14:1, 7-14**
("Those who exalt themselves will be humbled. The first will be last.")

"My friend, go up higher."

It is perfectly understandable if this parable seems a little awkward to you and dated. People in our society do not choose their own spots at wedding banquets, and even more important modern halls are arranged in such a way that everyone is basically equal sitting around usually round tables.

But that doesn't mean we have abolished **the kind of self-seeking that is lampooned in this parable**. In fact there is often a fierce **competition** not for a higher seat at a banquet but **for a higher salary in the boardroom**. Of course we all need to provide for our families and the well-being of others. **But among top CEOs in many companies there is a ferocious desire for ever increasing benefits**, often paid for by cutting the workforce, **cutting other people out of jobs**. One of my friends described to me how the chairman of the corporation he belonged to pushed the elimination of a large number of jobs, which over a period of several years allowed him to take an additional compensation of over hundred million dollars. **Unfortunately this is not uncommon**.

And the motivation is the same as in today's parable: **a blind drive to the top**. One of the Nuns on the Bus, Sister Simone Campbell, whom I met last year, told me that she was talking to a CEO once and she asked him, "What could you possibly do with all the money you make, and why do you want even more?" And he said, "It's not the money. **I'm in competition with other CEOs for recognition**." So this recognition comes in the form of monetary compensation. Unfortunately the price of this going up higher is **the impoverishment of many others**: people

losing their jobs or having their wages stagnate. Maybe some of you have suffered the consequences of just such a behavior.

The point Jesus wants to make here is that **there is something wrong with always promoting yourself.** If others promote you because you are worth something to the common good or to the company or to society and they value what you offer, that's fine. But if your life is self-propelled drive to the top, it will not end well. **“Those who exalt themselves will be humbled. The first will be last.”** This is the way the creation is formed. Justice may not be done on earth, but **those who thirst for justice, Jesus says, are blessed and will be satisfied.** Life is too short to waste on what cannot satisfy.