

## TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR C)

September 1, 2019

Sirach 3:17–18, 20, 28–29 • Hebrews 12:18–19 • Luke 14:1, 7–14

### I.

Last week witnessed the commemoration of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the first African slaves at Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement in the New World (1607).

(Spain had earlier brought African slaves to St. Augustine in Florida, the oldest European settlement in what became the United States.)

The Jamestown event is significant because it took place just one month after the first meeting of the House of Burgesses—today the Virginia General Assembly—which is the oldest democratic body in Western Hemisphere.

This juxtaposition of events marked a contradiction at the outset of American history: the acceptance of a system, amid the development of democracy, that oppressed persons of African descent for centuries.

It is likely that those first twenty African slaves who arrived at Jamestown were at least nominally Catholic.

The reason is that they came from the Portuguese colony of Angola.

Portugal had mandated that slaves be baptized before leaving Africa (1607, 1619), and Portuguese law also required baptized slaves to receive religious instruction during the passage to the Americas, although this norm was often disregarded.

The ship transporting the slaves was headed for Mexico, but it was intercepted by pirates who eventually brought the slaves to Point Comfort (Hampton).

The slaves then came to Jamestown.

At least one of the original slaves is known by name: Angelo (probably Angela), who became a household servant at Jamestown.

**II.**

It's something to think about:

among the first to arrive at Jamestown were the "last,"  
in the sense of being the lowest, in society.

And it's a legacy that we, as a country, still haven't resolved,  
as racism and racial unrest remain with us.

**III.**

The parable in today's Gospel reading develops a theme in Jesus' preaching,  
that the last shall be first and the first shall be last:

"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled,  
but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

The followers of Christ are to be humble themselves,  
and they are to seek out those who have been humbled—marginalized—by society:

"When you hold a banquet,  
invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind;  
blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you.  
For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Humility, in the sense of personal virtue,  
means seeing accepting oneself as one is: the good and the bad.

It doesn't mean no longer striving.

It means understanding that God brings his grace to perfection in us,  
and that we respond to his initiative and power.

The splendor, generosity, and mercy of God, we could say,  
"put us in our place."

Both the Second Reading and the Gospel allude to the Eucharistic Celebration,  
where take our proper places before God.

The reading from the Letter to the Hebrews describes the Sunday assembly of  
Christians in epic terms:

“You have approached Mount Zion  
 and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...  
 and the assembly of the firstborn enrolled in heaven,  
 and God the judge of all,  
 and the spirits of the just made perfect,  
 and Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant,  
 and the sprinkled blood that speaks more eloquently  
 than that of Abel.”

That’s what happens at Sunday Mass:  
 earth is joined to heaven; the communion of saints gathers.

The Gospel reading narrates a regular feature of Jesus’ public ministry:  
 table fellowship.

The sinless Son of God shares a meal—fellowship—with sinners.

That anticipates and prepares for the definitive meal and fellowship  
 that is the Last Supper, which takes place on the eve of Jesus’ Passion.

There, Christ gives himself completely—to all people for all ages.

The Holy Mass is a renewal of Jesus’ Passion, Death, and Resurrection.

It’s communion—a deep sharing—in that event of salvation.

It’s in the Eucharistic Sacrifice—the Mass—that we find our proper place.

Significantly, each celebration of the Mass begins with the Penitential Act.

This rite reminds us that each of us is unworthy to be here;  
 but that God makes us worthy—holy—through this liturgical celebration.

Listen again to the Gospel:

“When you hold a banquet,  
 invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind;  
 blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you.  
 For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

We ourselves are the poor, crippled, lame, and blind;  
we cannot repay God for what he does.

And Christ will be “repaid” at end of time in the sense that then God’s plan  
will come to fulfillment.

Therefore, the Eucharist “looks forward”  
—it anticipates—  
the consummation of God’s plan.

So, a few thoughts to ponder today and this week.

Truly, all are welcome here at the Lord’s table in the Holy Mass;  
everyone is meant to be here.

We can be who we are here at Mass—  
we don’t need to pretend to be other than who we are.

And the unity in the Mass is meant to be a sign and engine—a “sacrament”—  
of the unity of society.

#### **IV.**

Yesterday I participated in the Slave Trail Walk led by our very own parish  
deacon, Charles Williams, who serves as the head of the Office for Black Catholics  
at our diocese.

That walk gets one thinking about one’s place in society and in the Church.

There is much suffering and injustice in the world, even in our own country.

There is also much to be proud of.

Each of us, regardless of our circumstances in life,  
has a place and a role in society.

We each have a place at the table of God’s Kingdom,  
because he makes us worthy to be here.