Fr Matthew Charlesworth, SJ
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22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Date: Sunday, August 31, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C
First Reading: Sirach 3:17–18, 20, 28–29
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 68:4–7, 10–11 | **Response:** Psalm 68:11b
Second Reading: Hebrews 12:18–19, 22–24a
Gospel Acclamation: Matthew 11:29ab
Gospel Reading: Luke 14:1, 7–14
Preached at: the Chapel of Emmaus House **in the** Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe**.**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Imagine a simple, open table—nothing polished, just a surface wide enough for whoever comes. In today's Gospel, Jesus turns a meal into a glimpse of God's kingdom. And he invites us to ask: Where do I sit? Who have I invited?

We all know what it's like to gather for a meal—family dinner, tea with a friend, or bread shared in silence. Tables carry memories. They're places of talk, laughter, and quiet. Places of welcome. But not every table is open. And not every chair is offered.

Sirach, in our first reading, invites us to the table with humility: "My child, perform your tasks with humility… the greater you are, the more you must humble yourself." As Pope Francis said in his *Jubilee of Mercy* address, "If you want to find God, seek Him in humility, seek Him in poverty, seek Him where He is hidden: in the neediest, in the sick, in the hungry, in the imprisoned."

This echoes Mary's *Magnificat*—that the Lord lifts up the lowly and fills the hungry. It's also a call to us: open our tables to those left without a seat.

Humility isn't pretending to be less than we are. It's recognising everything is gift. It's the courage to take the lower place without resentment. The strength to serve, to listen, to step back.

Sirach warns that pride is a sickness—it closes the heart. But humility opens it. It makes space for God, and for others.

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In Zimbabwe, we see humility daily: in those who give when they have little, who serve quietly, who forgive when it costs. In the nurse who listens with patience. In the child who shares lunch. In the priest who visits every home. They don't seek recognition—but they are the ones Christ sees.

Once we see how humility opens the heart, the Psalm shows us what flows from God's own: hospitality. It tells us who God is: "Father of orphans and protector of widows… He gives the desolate a home." St Augustine said true praise isn't just words—it's a life that cares for the poor. In this psalm, God is the host who keeps pulling up chairs. He sees the one left out and says, "Come. Sit. You are welcome."

This is not just a beautiful invitation. It is a demand of justice. In our towns and cities, many still stand outside. Orphans, widows, refugees, hungry children, lonely elders—how often do they find our churches closed, or our hearts already full?

The Second Vatican Council said the Church must be "a home for all, especially the poor, the sick and the stranger" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 23). *Lumen Gentium* calls the People of God "a sacrament of love that welcomes the stranger." The Church is the house of the Father—where all are welcomed, and none turned away.

Hebrews gives us two mountains. Sinai, where people trembled before fire and thunder. And Zion, the city of the living God—where angels gather, and mercy speaks louder than judgement. "We come to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant… to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."

Victorinus said: "The blood of Christ does not cry for revenge like Abel's. It speaks forgiveness, welcome, peace." God's table is not a courtroom—it is a feast. Vatican II sees this "better word" as the grace that fuels the Church's hospitality (*Gaudium et Spes*, 23).

In the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, the First Week confronts us with our sin, our disorder, our need for grace. We begin in silence, aware of our fragility. But we don't stay there. The Exercises move us to the joy of the Second Week, where we gaze on Christ who calls. We move from fear to love, from Sinai's trembling to Zion's song. We are not guests by merit, but by mercy. Christ himself sets the table.

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Now we come to the Gospel. Jesus is at a meal. He watches guests scramble for the best seats. And he tells a parable: “When you are invited, go and sit at the lowest place… for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

These two parables—both unique to Luke—come from lived concern. Luke writes for a world shaped by honour and hierarchy. The first echoes Proverbs (25:6-7): “Do not put yourself forward… better to be told, ‘Come up here.’” What may sound like etiquette becomes a moral summons: wait to be called; do not grasp. And remember who the true Host is. For Luke, the table points to the Lord’s banquet—where the last are seated first.

Then Jesus turns to the host: “When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind… You will be blessed, because they cannot repay you.”

The Church Fathers heard in this not just social teaching—but heaven’s pattern. God invites those the world forgets. And he asks us to do the same.

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, whom we remember today, show us this pattern in flesh and blood: men of stature who took the lower place, stepped forward quietly when others fled, and offered their hands, their spices, their tomb—not for praise, but for love. They made space for Christ when the world had shut him out.

So—who is at your table? Who is missing? Are we only inviting those who look like us, or love like us, or who can repay us? Or are we making room for those Jesus names—the ones who can give us nothing but their presence?

In Zimbabwe, many tables are still too small. Poverty narrows the invitation. Fear builds walls. Corruption locks the door. But the Gospel calls us to stretch the table. To add more chairs. To make room for those left behind.

The Eucharist is that kind of table. We come with empty hands—not because we earned it, but because we are loved. We are invited. Fed. And then sent—to go and set more tables in the world.

So think of your own table. Who sits there? Who have you not yet invited? What would it mean to pull up another chair?

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Some small things we can do:

- Invite a neighbour for a meal.
- Volunteer at the parish kitchen or hospital.
- Write to someone in prison or exile.
- Set a spare place at dinner and pray for those who go without.

These acts are small—but not small in God's eyes. This is how the kingdom grows: one seat at a time.

And as we stretch our tables, let us stretch our hearts in prayer.

Tomorrow marks the 10th Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, opening the Season of Creation—a time when the Church, with Christians around the world, renews her call to care for our common home and to widen the circle of compassion to include not only the poor, but the earth itself.

Today we remember Gaza, where tables are shattered by war. Ukraine, where families are torn apart. Cabo Delgado in Mozambique, where fear drives people from home. May the God of peace bring justice and healing. And may we—even from far away—be part of that peace: through prayer, words, and small acts of love.

Three questions to bring into prayer:

- When have I taken the best seat, instead of letting someone else go first—at the table, in conversation, or in the world's resources?
- Who in my life might need a seat at my table—and how might I also make room for the silent cry of creation?
- How can the Eucharist help me live this week with greater humility, welcome, and care for both neighbour and nature?

Let us bring these questions to our examen. Let us ask God to show us where we can move down the table, so someone else can have a place.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus,
you welcomed the poor and took the lowest place.
Teach us to do the same.

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Help us to live humbly,
to open our tables to others,
and to care for the earth as your gift.
Where there is pain, help us plant seeds of peace.
Where there is despair, help us sow seeds of hope.
May our lives bear fruit that lasts.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.