

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

(Luke 14: 1-11)

Poem Vol. 3. pp. 324, 331, Vol. 4, p. 636;
Gospel Vol. 5, pp. 264-5, 272-3, Vol. 8, p. 137)

(Jesus has been invited to the home of Ishmael, the Pharisee. He accepts the invitation, but His agenda is different from that of Ishmael...)

...Jesus enters Ishmael's magnificent country house. Many servants rush to meet the Guest, Who is certainly expected. Some go and inform the landlord, who comes out to meet Jesus, bowing low.

'You are welcome to my house, Master!'

'Peace to you, Ishmael Ben Fabi. You wanted to see Me. Here I am. Why did you want Me?'

'To have the honour of having You and to introduce You to my friends. I want them to be Your friends as well. As I want You to be my friend.'

'I am the friend of everybody, Ishmael.'

'I know. But, You know! It is wise to have friends high up. And I and my friends are such. Forgive me for telling You, but You neglect those who can help You - too much...'

'And are you one of those who can help me? Why?'

'I am. Why? Because I admire You, and I want You to be my friend.'

'Friend! But do you know, Ishmael, the meaning I attach to that word? Friend to many people means acquaintance, to some it means accomplice, to some servant. To Me it means: faithful to the Word of the Father. Whoever is not such, cannot be My friend. Neither can I be his.'

(Other guests arrive, some of whom are very anxious to impress Jesus with their "supposed" generosity to poor people. During the course of the meal which is served, Jesus cures a sick man who was heard calling for Him from outside the house - even though it was the Sabbath Day. He then exposes and embarrasses Ishmael as a cruel landowner, for evicting two little children and leaving them to starve. He says to the assembled guests:)

'...God sees you from the height of His throne. And He judges you. How many does He see who are better than you are! So listen. As a rule, always act as follows: When you are invited to a wedding banquet, always choose the last place. Double honour will come to you when the landlord says: "Come forward, my friend". Honour to your merit, and your humility. Whereas it will be a sad moment for a proud man to be shamed, and hear the landlord say: "Go down there to the end, because there is someone here more worthy than you are".

And do the same in the secret banquet of your souls at the wedding with God. He who humbles himself will be exalted, and he who exalts himself will be humbled. Ishmael, do not hate Me for curing you. I do not hate you. I came to cure you. You are more seriously ill than that man I cured. You invited Me to give prestige to yourself, and satisfaction to your friends. You often invite people, but you do it out of pride and for pleasure. Do not do that. Do not invite rich people, relatives and friends. Open your house and your heart to the poor, to beggars, cripples, lame people, orphans and widows. In return, they will give you blessings. And God will change them into graces. And at the end... what a happy destiny for all the merciful. who will be rewarded by God at the resurrection of the dead! But woe to those who cherish only hopes of profit, and later close their hearts to the brothers who can no longer serve them. Woe to them! I will avenge the abandoned.'

'Master... I... I want to please You. I will take those children back again.'

'No, you will not.' replies Jesus.

'Why?'

'Ishmael?!...' says Jesus.

And Ishmael lowers his head...

(At another time, Jesus and His apostles are about to come down from a high mountain. Jesus says:)

'...We are going down to the valley to find rest and food. But if that is necessary to our bodies, it is not necessary to satisfy sensual lust and spiritual laziness by descending into the valleys of moral and spiritual sensuality. You are allowed to reach one valley only: the valley of humility. God Himself descends into it, to abduct humble spirits, and raise them to Himself. He who humbles himself will be exalted. Any other valley is lethal, because it removes one from Heaven....'