

I was behind bars last week; on Wednesday I was locked up as part of a fundraiser for children with Muscular Dystrophy; some of you were contacted to help me raise my bail. And I thank you for your generous donations.

It was a good opportunity to meet some of the folks from this community, that were there helping with the fundraiser. And so I put on my collar and was picked up to serve my jail time. Really it was a lunch where you had some extra time to make couple additional phone calls. It was a neat experience and it actually taught me a lesson.

See I grew up in Slovakia, where despite the long 40 years of communism church still holds very respected if not prominent place in the society. If someone knows, you're a pastor for example they treat you with very special attention and honor. Like one day, I went to the dentist and the office was quite behind a schedule and there were all these people sitting in the waiting room, and I thought well this will be hours before I'll get in. And then the door opened and the doctor peaked out and she saw me. Now she was a member of my congregation and when she saw me, with the loudest and proudest voice, she said good morning pastor Oslik, please come in right away....

There were like twenty people ahead of me, all of them glaring at me with hatred, I just wanted to vanish—so I did, right into the dentist's office. See in her mind, pastor should not wait with the rest of the people, he deserves more honorable place. And let me tell you when people treat you this way, it can become quite contagious. (pause)

And then we moved to America. There goes the special attention. ☺ But actually we ended up moving into the heart of the Pennsylvania Dutch country, the German Lutheran community, where church tradition is still very rooted in the lives of people. And so again, pastors were much respected, and called to all special community occasions.

And then we moved to the Pacific Northwest...tam, tam, tam... And that's where my experience from Wednesday comes in, I walked into a room full of people, with my collar on, and no one was like: Oh welcome pastor, here we have a special seat for you, it's such an honor that you're here... None of that happened; I was treated just like everyone else. And so when I

came home I shared with Andrea about this interesting observation and the difference between these communities or cultures.

And then I read today's Gospel reading and Jesus spoke to me and said: When you're invited by someone to a wedding banquet or a jail lock up do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host will say to you: Give this person your place. (pause) What do these words mean for us in today's society?

Well humbleness is almost a non existing virtue, for we're taught that we need to be first, and best, and that glamour, fame and glory are the things to strive for. We forget what lays behind these things, the negative and consuming effect they have on our lives... just read People's Magazine. But Christ says, this is not my way, I require humility and humbleness of my disciples. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. Now this is not an easy way to live our lives, but it is Christ's way. Christ says, as my disciples, don't look for places of honor, but always seek ways how to lift someone else up, in humbleness serve the needs of those around you, putting others before you knowing that it pleases our God.

Now, this part of the sermon came easily to me. But I struggled with the second part of the gospel for this whole week. What can I possibly say to any of you about seeking out the blind and lame and bringing them to "the banquet?" I wrote the second part of this sermon to distraction, and just couldn't be satisfied with it. I felt frustrated even with the gospel itself. How can I preach about this? How do we as a community of faith *reach out* to the poor, crippled, lame and blind?

I suppose we're doing these things to a certain extent with hot meals, Sophia way, and operation nightwatch, but we won't find many crippled, blind or poor in our Klahanie neighborhood. Perhaps Christ is calling us to look beyond our neighborhoods, for the truth is that there are plenty in need in today's world. How can we follow the words of Christ today: to give a banquet for which we expect NO return?

I think we can recommit ourselves to extending this banquet to the poor and needy around the world. Each week we pray for our missionaries who work in some of the poorest part

of the world. Let us each make a commitment to reach out to these people in a “non-repayable” way. We could write a letter of encouragement, set up a prayer chain, share with others about their ministry, send a check ☺... there are many ways to fulfill this calling, and to extend Christ’s banquet to all of his children.

Today’s reading was about a banquet, it was about everyone being invited to take a place at the table. We have a table here at our church and everyone is invited, there are no prominent places, there is are no guests of honor, there is only one host, one body, and one blood that was shed for us all. It is our Lord Jesus Christ that invites us all to come to him, to find God’s strength and then to go out into the world to give ourselves away in humbleness as his disciples in service of his love.

AMEN.