

**When you have people over for dinner, usually it's friends or relatives, or friends of your relatives – or relatives of your friends; it's neighbors or classmates you haven't seen in a long time. You invite people over because you expect you'll have a great time. Meals do this. They spark conversation. They bring up stories. They hold people together. Putting on a meal for someone is a lot of work, but it is usually worth it if it lets you spend time with a pleasant guest.**

**Jesus ate out a lot, but he was not always a pleasant guest. He didn't host meals; he didn't have a home with a kitchen and a dining room. He multiplied loaves and fish for a crowd or two, but he preferred to eat out.**

**In today's gospel Jesus goes to the home of one of the leading Pharisees. It was the sabbath, and Jesus had just cured someone; well, you were supposed to rest on the sabbath, not to do something that resembled work. But the Pharisees couldn't criticize Jesus for disobeying the letter of the law without appearing callous to his loving assistance to the sick. This tension is in the background as the meal gets underway.**

**People are watching Jesus, and he is watching them. He notices who is sitting where, who was invited to this meal, and who was not invited. Instead of saying pleasantly how nice it is to come over for a lovely lunch, he takes issue with the other guests and even with his host. It's important to be polite and respectful, especially when you are the guest at a meal, but it's also important to help people live a better life.**

**When you are a guest, Jesus says, don't go for the best seats at the table. Just because you got invited doesn't mean you are the most important person who got invited. Hold back. Let the host invite you forward.**

**When you are the host, Jesus says, be careful whom you invite. The temptation is to invite people you hope will do you some favor in return: invite you to a meal, give a friend a job, or even provide emotional support in times of need. But Jesus suggests a different kind of guest list: the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Invite people who need your assistance. Invite people who can never repay you for your kindness.**

**Around here people are usually very good about inviting others in. There is almost always enough food at the table for one more mouth, and people are willing to share. They have discovered that the joy of a meal comes in welcoming and sharing, not in expecting something back.**

**It's a good lesson in every area of life. We should be humble; we should not take ourselves too seriously. We should also be generous. We should be ready to share what we have without expecting something in return. Jesus challenges us to adopt those attitudes; his words should cause some tension within us. But when we follow his advice we will discover peace with one another.**