Today’s reading from the Gospel of Luke is just another reason why I love both books by this evangelist St. Paul calls the “Beloved Physician”. He ... of course wrote ... not just for the Jewish community ... but for all of us. And ... in St. Luke’s account of the life of our Lord ... he stresses the importance of a topic that is near and dear to my heart ... that of the meal! ... St. Luke’s portrayal shows us a Jesus ... who attached great significance and importance to food ... and to the simple act ... of gathering to eat.

He shared meals with both the much-hated ... tax collectors and ... dined with the socially elite Pharisees. He scandalized the Jewish leaders by His apparent laxity ... about fasting and by allowing His disciples to pick the heads of grain as they walked through the fields ... technically in violation of the Sabbath. And when He taught us to pray ... his first petition was for “our daily bread” and then He told us not to worry ... that our Heavenly Father would provide it. He was concerned for feeding the multitudes ... that came out to hear Him ... and at the Last Supper, of course, He gave us that dearest food ... Himself in the Eucharist. And after His resurrection ...He revealed Himself to the disciples he had met on the road to Emmaus ... “in the breaking of the bread” and later ... to the disciples in Jerusalem by sharing a meal ... of baked fish.

And when He taught ... frequently it was at a meal and very often the meal itself ... would be the setting for the lesson ... from the banquet where the rich man ignored Lazarus ... to the feast a loving father ... prepared for his prodigal son. We have just such a lesson today. At today’s Gospel meal Jesus serves up one of his favorite dishes ... a lesson in humility ... ... and the pitfalls of false pride.

We know nothing about the Pharisee who invited Jesus to this banquet ... except that he was one of the leaders of that group. We do know that many there were watching Jesus ... hoping to catch Him ... in violation ... of some custom or law ... that this might be used against Him later. But as they were watching Him ... He was watching them ... and making note of their posturing ... and jockeying ... for position ... each trying to ensure that his lofty status was acknowledged, respected and ... possibly even increased. I imagine Our
Lord watched all this with some amusement … and then finally … used the occasion to teach … “everyone who exalts himself will be humbled…”

Everyone … at one time or another … has seen one of those old comedies … where a snob or maybe a bully … gets his … or her “comeuppance” … maybe slips on the banana peel or otherwise looses his dignity and we usually laugh or cheer … at least inwardly. And don’t we get a sort of perverse delight when we see that arrogant so-and-so … that passed us a few miles back … going 20 miles over the speed limit … off on the side of the road … in front of a car with a … flashing red light? Don’t we really enjoy it? I must admit I do … that is … unless … the one who is being humbled … is me! That is no laughing matter! And occasionally … that too … happens!

The problem is … when I am the one who is allowing false pride to lead me into self-exultation … it is nowhere near as easy for me to see … as it is when another is doing it. And if I do see it … on me it never looks quite as bad and seems much easier for me to forgive. …And if my false pride leads me into sin … well … God will surely understand.

And there is the trap! It has always been so! From the sin of pride which led to that first rebellion against God by the forces of evil … to the sin of pride that led our first parents to disobedience … right down to this very day … every sin we commit … has been preceded by the sin … of false pride. For by its very definition … sin … is choosing to do our will … over God’s will. And that … is the sin of false pride!

Now … if I have achieved any success in life … by whatever … criteria you define success … If I have achieved success in life … and believe it was all because of my own efforts … that God and His goodness had nothing to do with it … I commit a very serious sin of false pride. And this must inevitably lead to other sins … ignoring the needs of others … the poor … the church … to name a few.

And consider for a moment those sins against the fifth commandment … the abortions … the executions … the wars … those killed in gang violence … those killed for greed … lives lost … because men or women … in their arrogance and false pride … believe they are qualified to make the decision … and have the right … to deprive someone … of the gift of life … given them … by God. …
Sadly … in the culture of our world today … selfishness … and false pride are applauded as
rights and Faith and a sense of sin … are portrayed as roadblocks … things that hold us
back from reaching our potential.  And so … maybe be won’t be humbled … in this world.
But … that is really too bad … because then … our humbling … will surely be in the next.