

TRINITY NEWS

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*But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.
Luke 14*

*B*ack in the 70's when I was young and carefree, I lived for a year in a small apartment off the Ramblas in Barcelona right next to the city's bustling port. The neighborhood was full of small businesses, markets, kiosks and flower stalls, cafes, bars, restaurants and the streets thronged with people from all walks of life all day. But it was in the evening that the place really got lively: the usual locals, rowdy sailors, gawking tourists, rich folk down for a night on the town, and scads of vendors, gypsies, beggars, pick-pockets and destitute musicians trying to make ends meet. It was a veritable carnival, and I enjoyed it thoroughly spending many an evening sitting over after-dinner coffee at one of the outdoor cafes, taking it all in.

But perhaps my favorite places in the area was a church across the Ramblas from where I lived – I don't remember the name – Santa Mònica rings a bell, but I'm not sure – I often dropped in for their early mass before I headed uptown for school, or conversely on Sunday mornings on my way home from a party somewhere (like I said I was young and carefree!) when I knew there was no way I'd make it to the Anglican church up near the school.

It was a large, airy building, light streaming in from many windows, the sounds of the port filtering through, and the people: it was the people that got me. Nuns who taught at a nearby school, local housewives with their veils and rosaries, merchants on their way to work, school children, sailors, weary well-dressed revelers on their way home to sleep, gypsies, beggars, bartenders, bargirls, high and low, rich and poor, saints and sinners – and me – all gathered as guests at our Lord's table. And I remember the very special feeling that inevitably took hold of me when the bell rang and we all knelt for the consecration, all facing the altar as the priest raised the host; the light spilling in through the high windows, the sound of the gulls, the priest intoning the words institution. I felt incredibly and deeply united to these people whom I did not know and probably never would. God had called us all in off the grungy streets of the city to this banquet to share the holy food and drink of unending life in him. I always think of that scene when I am asked to explain what the church really is: telling this story is the only way I can do that.