

I CALL YOU FRIENDS

Adam and Eve. We know the story. Misuse of freedom. Mistrust of God. Selfishly taking that which they desired and wanted but wasn't good for them and had not been given to them. They disregarded the request of God. What they did not realize until it was too late was that they had been enjoying this wonderful relationship of friendship with the living God who would come to walk with them each day at twilight in the cool of the day.

Their reaction to what they had done tells us everything we need to know. They try to hide from God. They are ashamed. They realize they are naked and very vulnerable. They have not only turned away from God but they turn on each other. Had there been busses in the Garden of Eden they would each have thrown the other under it. Adam blames both God for putting Eve there (up to that point she had been his suitable helpmate) and Eve for tempting him. Eve blames the serpent. Both disobeyed God's warning. What is the result? Estrangement. Estrangement between God and them, and eventually between God and all of us. But also estrangement between us ourselves. The bond of friendship between God and man, and the bond of friendship between men and women had been sundered.

But here's the thing. Our first parents could not make things right or better, could not fix things, could not repair the breach. It had not been done to them. They did it to God. They did it to each other. They could be sorry but they could not make things right again. Something had happened to the whole fabric of human life on this earth. For things to be made right it would have to be done by God because God was the One sinned against. And so, God acts.

God would not accept our disobedience and our selfish use of freedom to be our final word. God revealed that He would send One to restore us, to save us from the damage and destructive dimensions of our sin. One who would restore our lost innocence. One who show us how to live and how to be with each other in this life—and the next. Most of all God desired to restore the friendship He had with us, the friendship He wanted with us.

Human friendship is one of the greatest of all gifts. A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter, A true friend is one who treasures the bond that unites them in their friendship. A faithful friend remains true, abides and forgives. Today's readings got me to thinking about the great friends I have had in my life. Somewhere in each of those friendships I made a choice for the other person. It is not the same as

the spousal or marriage choice that a man and a woman make to be faithful and true and dedicated. But there is definitely a choosing to be friend.

In our culture we struggle more now than in the past fifty years with friendships. Because of the Sexual Revolution of the 1970's every element or dimension of our lives as adults has become sexualized. Two men can have a wonderful friendship. It need not become sexual in terms of affection. Similarly with two women who are the best of friends. But there are some who say there is only one kind of valuable and treasured relationship and that is a relationship with an explicit and active sexual dimension to it. That is just not true. Part of the vow of chastity of religious women and men and part of the oath of celibacy that priests take is the simple truth that there is more to life and friendship than our sexual expression.

We all knew this once upon a time but we seem to have forgotten. I have had wonderful, deep and lasting friendships with men and women, priests, religious and lay that were not sexually based. Why do we find that so difficult to grasp or to live? Can it not be that there is a kind of relationship that lasts, abides and brings life and goodness to the other without it having to move into the realm of physical intimacy?

Jesus of Nazareth addresses this very question in the reading for this Sunday. "I no longer call you servants...I call you friends." We are not servants of God so much as we are served by God. We cannot restore the broken relationships of life but God can and does. Jesus need not enter into marital intimacy in order to live a full life. No, there is a kind of friendship that transcends the mere physical if we would dare to believe. Jesus restores all of us and each of us to real friendship with God, a friendship born of God's forgiveness announced on the cross by Jesus as He himself lay dying on it. Father forgive them..." Jesus was a man of deep friendships and many such but always in harmony with the will of His Father. He has restored to us the friendship we lost through sin and restored it through faithful and forgiving grace. That is the only way. God has thought it through. God knows what He is about and what he is trying to do. We have to trust God in this. That is what Christ asks and that is what our own deep personal friendships must live and display for the sake of those around us. I call you friends. Yes He does. Yes He does.