

# The Warmth of Friendship

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Friendship is an altar of love. There should be sacrificial offerings of reconciliation, sharing and giving in among the people who love.

**L**ife becomes meaningful only when we have someone to love and when we are loved by someone. Without friends and companions, life becomes dull and drab. People who lead a solitary life express the same opinion. If love or friendship does not blossom as expected, people seek pleasure and satisfaction elsewhere and they may become slaves to unholy habits. Confined to a life of loneliness, they may find life meaningless and consequently even lose trust in God. “..Gone is my glory and all that I had hoped for from the Lord” (Lam: 3:18). So, friendship should be treated as something very precious. “Faithful friends are beyond price; No amount can balance their worth. Faithful friends are life-saving medicine” (Sir 6:15-16).

## A TREASURE TO BE FOUND

Man's emotional self yearns for love. The greatest pain that a person can experience is the feeling that there is no one to love him. The anguish experienced by the paralyzed man who lay by the pool of Bethesda was that there was no one to love or help him. This is reflected in what he expresses to Christ, “...I have no one to put me into the pool...” (Jn:5:7). These emotional wounds need to be healed through divine friendship. This is why Jesus tries to help and strengthen the paralyzed man like a true friend. Psychological studies reveal that people who do not have friends and friendships lack adequate mental growth and maturity. Consider friendship as a great gift from God. “Faithful friends are a sturdy shelter. Whoever finds one has found a treasure” (Sir 6:14).

## THE REDEEMING POWER OF FRIENDSHIP

The loving presence of some people has the power to transform the life of another. There is a saying that domestic dogs are nothing but tamed wolves. Wild animals taking instructions from their ring-masters in circus rings as though they are domesticated and tamed, are not an uncommon sight. This transformation is the consequence of a chemical reaction that takes place in the body and mind of

the animal due to the tender touch of a loving heart. The chemistry of love! In Kasinda Sakis' novel (God's Pauper) a character says thus, "However saintly a person is, there is a hidden larva of evil in him. Looking at that larva, if one says, 'I love you' that larva will turn into a colourful butterfly. That is the spirituality of complete love. "Let us realize then, that everyone possesses the seeds of goodness in him. True friendship saves and transforms others.

### **A MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE**

When I was writhing in pain in the hospital bed and undergoing tremendous mental agony due to an accident I met with, it was my close friends who gave me strength and support. Being lonely, I would often break down. While I trudged through those painful paths of suffering and loneliness, many of my close friends came in to wipe those tears of sorrow and stood by me as a pillar of help, strength and support! The sweet taste of the meals that we shared from the same plate with great love, still lingers on my tongue! Who else can share this kind of love? Only those, whose hearts are filled with God's love. Wasn't it God Himself who was comforting me through these friends, donning the garb of friendship? Oh God! How do I repay my friends for this great love?

### **SOME WOUNDS AND REVELATIONS**

Many people brood over tearful experiences of lost friendship and deceptions faced by them in their relationships. In the Bible we come across Job who experiences mental agony on losing his friendship with God (Job 29:4). Wrong perspectives and values are the cause of all strained relationships. Friendship is a gift from God. It is God's plan for us. The language of friendship is love. The God who created Adam realized that the greatest yearning of his heart was friendship. God noticed the loneliness in his heart and the sadness on his face and said, "**It is not good that the man should be alone**" (Gen 2:18). God created Eve and brought her before him as his companion. Joy and gratitude flooded Adam's heart and he responded, "**This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh**" (Gen 2:23). The first romantic poem ever written in history! If friendship is a gift from God, God has to be present in that friendship; such friendship will never break. "**Those who fear the Lord direct their friendship aright.....**" (Sir 6:17).

### **GOD OF RELATIONSHIPS**

It is a very comforting thought that we can see the various aspects of divine friendship in God himself. It is said that the Trinity - Father, Son and the Holy

Spirit is a union of love. Therefore, friendship is as old as God himself and it has the nature of God. The Bible tells us about the special friendship that God forged with certain people. Abraham and Moses were considered God's friends. "The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend" (Ex 33:11). God calls Abraham, "My friend" (Is 41:8; 2 Chr: 20:7).

## THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

All the relationships in Jesus' life had the touch and beauty of friendship. This is quite evident in the following words of Jesus, "I do not call you servants any longer...but I have called you friends" (Jn 15:15). Through these words, Jesus makes friendship divine and purifies it by fire. By washing the feet of the ones whom he loved, Jesus anointed all the relationships with love. Jesus showed very clearly that love cannot be forced out from anyone. It is a holy emotion that has to be emptied out as a spiritual gift. This is another divine aspect of friendship that has to be borne in mind. Never use anyone as a medium for one's comforts, or the fulfillment of pleasure or to gain something.

All friendships should lead us to God and spiritual growth. It has to be rooted in the divine aspects of sacrifice, sharing and humbling of one's self. A good example is the friendship between Jesus and the family of Lazarus. "... Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus" (Jn 11:5). "...See how he loved him!" (Jn 11:36).

There is a touching scene in the Bible in which Jesus shares his sorrow, distress and mental agony with his close friends. "He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death..." (Mk 14:33, 34). This is the distress of the one who is lonely and betrayed. If you have a friend who is upset or troubled, let your heart be a temple of love for them - make it a resting place for them. When your heart turns out to be an inn where they can rest and unburden themselves, your friendship becomes purely a relationship of love. Let your heart be like a confessional, where you can listen to and hold all that is shared. Let your heart be a source of solace and comfort, a resting place for people to wipe their tears when they are experiencing pain.

The speciality of Jesus' friendship is that he wished to be with those whom he loved. "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20). Even in his call to discipleship, one can see a touch of friendship. He chose his disciples in order to

be with him (Mk 3:14). For Jesus, friendship is a relationship that does not sway under any circumstance as though it were a contract. Jesus does not keep his friends at bay even if there is deception or denial from them. A striking scene from the Bible is where Jesus, after resurrection appears to the disciples trying to re-establish his friendship.

Jesus through his death on the cross proved that the essence of friendship lies not in receiving from others but in giving others, thereby teaching the basic tenet of friendship. **“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:13).** The heart of Jesus is the tabernacle of friendship. It is that heart which is an inspiration and example of true friendship. Therefore, let us cleanse our friendship by fire. All the grey areas in our friendship have to be erased and purified by his divine touch.

### **MAKE FRIENDSHIP A CELEBRATION**

Do you have any friendship that is strained due to some bitter experience? Do you feel heart-broken due to the wounds inflicted by such broken relationships? Do not be upset, my dear friend. Start your life afresh with God. Any relationship that starts with God will have the joy of a celebration. Friendship is an altar of love. There should be sacrificial offerings of reconciliation, sharing and giving in among the people who love. Only then, those who share this love will experience the fulfillment of that divine joy. If this kind of sacrificial offering is absent in your friendship, you will not find a place in anyone’s heart. A friendship will never fail if you love that friend wholeheartedly.

Peter realized that the meal served by Jesus on the table of love and friendship was tastier. Never again, after that, did he venture into the deep sea for fishing. Though the Last Supper is a commemoration, how can one forget the aroma of the Flesh and Blood that Jesus served with all his heart? What have you given to your friend to conquer his heart? Examine and see if there are stains of selfishness in your friendship when you did not notice the tears and lamentations of a troubled heart? Friendship is not a commodity to be used to acquire a few silver coins or to gain pleasure and comfort. It is a covenant that should be signed with tears of love on the paper of faithfulness. When a hollow heart is filled with divine love, friendship becomes a celebration.

## A FRIEND FOR YOU

Acknowledge the presence of your true friend in the Holy Eucharist. He is the one whom you can trust completely and with whom you can share all your sorrows and grievances. Isn't it because he wished to continue his friendship that he decided to give us his loving presence in the Holy Eucharist? The one who resides in the Holy Eucharist is your true friend, the one who sees your tears and understands the desires of your heart. There is no friend on this earth whom you can trust more than Christ. Come closer to him with all the wounds that you have received while walking through the paths of friendship. Uproot all that is not blessed by him and plant whatever he permitted in the soil of divine love. Maintain your friendship with the chastity of a hermit. Only if the root of friendship is firmly planted in the divine soil of prayer will the branches of friendship emerge fresh and beautiful. I offer you my prayers to develop this kind of friendship.

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