

I Shall No Longer Call You Servants . . .

I Call You Friends:

Eucharist and Friendship

Jack Dowling, SSS

February

*(Jesus) immolates himself on the altar, and he nourishes our souls in Holy Communion. He is man's good neighbor and friend . . . How few there are for whom Jesus sacramental is **the** love of their life!!*

Retreat of Rome

Mary 17, 1865

Preface

During the course of his religious and priestly life, Father Peter Julian Eymard referred to Jesus as “Judge,” “King,” “Master,” “Savior,” “Servant,” “good neighbor and friend” - to name a few titles we find in his writings and letters. Like us, Father Eymard clearly had different experiences in his prayer life and meditations. Out of those experiences came prayers and or reflections that speak to who and what Jesus was for him in those moments. Today’s session focuses on an important image of God as expressed in Jesus: friend.

Introduction to the Theme

The theme of this time together is the friendship with God which is offered to us in Jesus Christ, and how one of the culminations of this friendship takes place under the form of the Eucharist.

The two testaments of the Bible portray many facets of the relationship between God and humanity. God is described as a Judge, a King, a jealous Lover, jilted Lover, a faithful Lover, a Friend, and much more. Human beings are portrayed as creatures, as ground or dust, as sinners, as covenanters, as unfaithful lovers, as friends, and again as much else. In the gospel of John, friendship is revealed as the high point of the relationship with God which is offered to those who follow Christ.

Opening Prayer

Lord God, we thank you for this opportunity to meditate on the great gift you offer us in Jesus Christ: true friendship with you. We ask you, in the following texts, to help us to understand and to savor this crowning gift of your friendship, presented as the culmination of a long development of the relationship which you have pursued with us throughout the course of sacred revelation.

The leader should read these texts slowly and meditatively.

1. But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, offspring of Abraham, my friend (Isaiah 41:8).
2. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery . . . but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, “*Abba*, Father!” The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God . . . (Romans 8:15-16).
3. I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer . . . (Luke 22:15).
4. I shall no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know the master’s business; I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father (John 15:15).
5. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him . . . (Luke 24:30-31).
6. Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast” (John 21:12).

Work Exercise

1. Friendship is generally understood to be a close and lasting relationship between two persons. Recall some of the friendships in your life. What are some of the important aspects of these relationships? What do you expect of a friend?
2. In Genesis chapters 12-25, we read about Abraham and the special relationship he had with God. What do you recall about that relationship and what aspects connect with your answers to question 1?
3. The Eucharist is a creative symbol of a new relationship between God and human beings. For you, what is an important component of this new relationship?

The work exercise is followed by a small group sharing and a large group sharing.

Teaching

1. In the Old Testament only one person, Abraham, was designated as a “friend of God.” Other great figures such as Jacob, Moses, and David were referred to as servants of God. One reason for this is that Abraham received from God the promises which resulted in the foundation of the chosen people of God, and Abraham *believed* in these promises: “Abraham put his faith in the Lord who credited it to him as an act of righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). Thus, God entrusted the future of his people to Abraham and in his turn Abraham trusted in God. This mutual trust, a characteristic of any real friendship, became the paradigm for the relationship between God and his human creatures. Think of it: that God would entrust himself to a human being in a friendship. Think of how careful we tend to be before we call a relationship a real friendship. This is exactly how God acted with Abraham.
2. There was a long period of preparation for the deepening of the relationship of service or servanthood which humanity had with God in the first testament to the relationship made possible through the gift of Jesus in the New Testament. And even within the writings of the second testament, there seems to be a development in the understanding of the possibilities which this advent of Jesus makes available to those human beings who desire to be in relationship with God.

Saint Paul emphasizes the relation of adoption. He says that Christians should not be governed by the spirit of slavery, which is fear, but rather by the spirit of adoption, through which one calls God “Abba” - Father.

Jesus’ experience of God led him to call God his Father and invites his followers to do likewise. Paul interprets this to mean that in Christ and through his death and resurrection, we have been invited into the family of God, becoming God’s adopted children. So we have a familial relationship with God, as children have with their parents.

Saint John takes the understanding of this relationship with God, made possible by Jesus Christ, to a new level. In the last discourse, which is this evangelist’s summation of the Lord’s teaching, Jesus also tells his disciples that they are not slaves, because he has not hidden from them his experience of life with his Father. In fact they are his friends because he has entrusted them with “everything I have heard from my Father.” The metaphor here creates the picture of a father and a grown son sitting down together and discussing something of mutual importance to both of them. They can do this because besides being father and son, they are also friends.

3. The notion of friendship prevalent in the Hellenistic culture which was dominant in Jesus' time and place consisted in a mutually intimate relationship between equals. For slaves, children, women, and children, friendship was thought to be out of the question. Thus, it was restricted to relatively few and was considered to be the prerogative of educated citizens of the city states of that day.

The exchange of love which took place within a true friendship was thought to perfect the individuals involved and ultimately the society in which they lived. In that society, a man with some wealth at his disposal who felt death drawing near would often hold a last banquet, or symposium, to which he would invite his friends, and during which laudatory speeches would be delivered and a last will and testament would be read.

4. Saint John's last discourses at the farewell banquet of Jesus appear to have some similarities in literary purpose to this kind of symposium. However, at this supper the guests do not realize that they are "equals" of Jesus. He must announce it to them. It is here that the mystery of God's relationship with us is further revealed. Through God's coming to us in Jesus' humanity we are in some sense made divine, that is we are raised up so that we can share in the Father's communication with Jesus. We become partners in the Trinitarian conversation. We become friends of God.
5. So we are children who have become friends through God's gracious gift of himself in Jesus Christ. The disciples' gradual realization of this wonderful truth is often located by the sacred writers in appearances of the risen Lord while they are eating, or when they invite him to eat with them, or when he invites them to eat with him. His disciples come to recognize him again in the breaking of the bread. They must come to realize that because of what he has done for them, because of who he is, they are truly his friends. They can share with him at a level which was previously unimaginable because they knew neither their own depth nor the power of the love which has reached that depth.

The disciples on the way to Emmaus invited the eloquent, persuasive stranger in to dine with them and discovered that they had been empowered to be his friends in his blessing of the bread. The disciples, who had returned to their old occupation of fishing after Jesus' death, saw someone on the shore preparing a meal and recognized him as their *friend* when he called to them, "Come and have breakfast." The Eucharist is the meal at which Christians gather to once again recognize in Jesus Christ, the son of God, son of Mary, their brother by adoption, and their friend.

Closing Prayer

(In the presence of the Blessed Sacrament if possible)

First Reading: Romans 8:14-17

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, *Abba*, "Father!" The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

Period of Silence

Second Reading: John 15:11-15

"I have told you this so that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father."

Period of Silence

Intercessory Prayer

Eucharistic Litany

Leader:

Jesus, word of God

Jesus, son of God

Jesus, son of Mary

Jesus, conqueror of death

Jesus, conqueror of sin

Jesus, risen Lord of glory

All:

grant us faith.

grant us faith.

grant us faith.

grant us faith.

grant us faith.

grant us faith.

Healer of the sick

grant us hope.

Friend of the oppressed

grant us hope.

Teacher of wisdom

grant us hope.

Herald of God's kingdom

grant us hope.

Worker of miracles

grant us hope.

Source of peace

grant us hope.

Lamb of God	grant us love.
Bread of life	grant us love.
Bread from Heaven	grant us love.
Bread of true freedom	grant us love.
Bread of liberation	grant us love.
Bread of reconciliation	grant us love.
Flesh for the life of the world	grant us love.
Wine of compassion	grant us love.
Wine of joy	grant us love.
Wine of forgiveness	grant us love.
True drink of God's spirit	grant us love.
Taste of our future	grant us love.
Taste of eternal life	grant us love.
Pledge of immortality	grant us love.

(If prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament)

Benediction

Reposition

Closing Prayer

Jesus, Lord and Savior, nourishment and center of our lives,
empower us to feast joyfully at the table of your word and sacrament.

Teach us to understand all of human reality in the light of your Eucharist.

Living sacrifice of praise, cleanse us in your saving blood.
Victim that has reconciled all to God, bring us to live in peace with one another.

Bread of life, wine of compassion, transform us into one body.
Inspire us to become true adorers in spirit and in truth. Amen.

Dismissal with some sign of peace