

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Three friends, stranded on a desert island, find a magic lantern containing a genie, who grants them each one wish. The first friend wishes he was off the island and back home. The second friend wishes the same. The third friend says "I'm lonely. I wish my friends were back here."

Dear Friends,

We all have friends in our lives. It varies; we have our childhood friends, business friends, church friends, neighborhood friends and other friendships that we make. These friendships help us to show our genuine love to them and learn from them.

Today's Gospel and readings tells us to deepen our friendship with Jesus over a lifetime. I heard people say that I married my high school sweetheart, started with friendship, and became spouses for a lifetime.

When we consider what makes a good friend, at a human level this means someone who is there when we need them. A friend is someone we can talk to in good times and bad times, generally someone who is dependable and understands us, because many things are shared in a friendship. A good friend is someone who would go the extra mile to help us in a time of need, and someone who offers gifts and does not expect anything in return. A friend is someone who makes you feel energized after talking to them, someone you can speak to with complete confidence and assurance. Equally, someone is not a true friend if they manipulate you for their own benefit, or if the friendship is one-sided. If you find yourself having to pretend to be someone else when around them, this is not a good starting point. And if someone threatens you with violence, then this is not friendship.

Our understanding of friendship in a human context is a starting point for understanding how we could ever be friends with God. But trying to apply ideas about human-level friendships to a context of creating and maintaining a friendship with our creator is beyond our comprehension. But it is made more comprehensible in light of the Gospel passage for today. How could we be friends with God? We are friends with God if we do what he commands. This is a way of bridging the gap between humans and an omnipotent, all-knowing God.

Jesus tells his followers that he does not call them slaves anymore but calls them friends. In the Bible, Doulos, the slave, the servant of God was no title of shame; it was a title of the highest honor. Moses was the Doulos of God (Dt 34:5); so was Joshua (Jos 24:29); so was David (Ps 89:20). It is a title which Paul considered an honor to use (Ti 1:1); and so did James (James 1:1). The greatest men in the past had been proud to be called

the douli, the slaves of God. But Jesus says: "I have something greater for you yet. You are no longer slaves; you are friends." Christ offers an intimacy with God which not even the greatest of men knew before Jesus came into the world. The idea of being the friend of God also has a Biblical background. Abraham was the friend of God (Is 41:8). In Wis 7:27, Wisdom is said to make us the friends of God. In Rome in the first century, the Friends of the king, or the emperor, were those who had the closest and the most intimate connection with him. Jesus has called us to be his friends and the friends of God. Jesus has given us this intimacy with God, so that He is no longer a distant stranger, but our close friend.

Peter says that God shows no partiality. God's love is shared with everyone equally. God's acceptance is not based on any nationality. He accepts all of us because he loves us. The first reading reveals the unbound nature of God's love to all people, the second reading develops the community's inner commandment to love.

How do we want to be friends of God?

How can we make our friends, friends of God? Maybe try to help someone you know to make them friends of God this week.