

My Father's House

P.O. Box 22 Moodus, CT 06469 860/873-1581 f-860-873-2357 email: frbill@myfathershouse.com www.myfathershouse.com

I Call You to Be My Friends

Fr. Bill McCarthy, MSA

Intimacy With God

In the magnificent parable of the vine and the branches, Jesus says to us, "I have not called you to be slaves, for a slave does not know what the master is about. I have called you to be my friends because I tell you everything that I hear from my Father."

Christianity is the *Divine Romance*, as Bishop Fulton Sheen said long ago. It's a call to a loving, giving, heartfelt relationship with our God, who is love itself. This cannot be overemphasized. God is love and he who abides in love, therefore, abides in God. Our primary call is to love, to love God above all with His love; and secondly, our neighbor with the very love of Jesus.

Agape Love

It is not human love that we are referring to here, but God's supernatural, divine, inspired, agape love. God's love has a height in that it comes from Him and must be sighed, cried and prayed for. It has a depth in that it loves the unlovable, forgives the unforgivable, and reaches the unreachable. It has a breadth in that it loves every man, woman and child that one meets along the way with the very love of Jesus. It has a length that it never stops loving. As St. Paul says in that tremendous ode to love, "Love never ends."

Communities of Love

Thus, as Christians, we are called to be friends to one another -- that is, persons who really are interested in the welfare - spiritual, emotional and physical - of each other. Therefore, our parishes, our rectories, our convents, our communities, our retreat houses, our families are meant to be centers where the love of Christ is freely given and received. We are to be the most affirming and generous of people with our time, talents and treasure. We are to treat everyone as our brother and sister in Christ.

The Early Fathers

The early fathers often wrote homilies on friendship (*De Amicitia*). Fr. Paul Hinnebush, O.P. in our day has written a magnificent book called *Friendship in the Lord*, in which he describes the various stages of friendship as we pass from acquaintance to a friend to an intimate.

Friendship in the Old Testament

On one occasion, God spoke to Moses from the tabernacle in the desert. The Scriptures say, "The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face as one man speaks to his friend" (*Ex 33:11*). Through the prophet Isaiah, God spoke to "Abraham my friend" (*Isaiah 48*). The chosen people relied upon his friendship to obtain graces.

Friendship in the New Testament

The New Testament Christians not only shared all things in common, but loved each other so much that the

Gentiles would say of them, "See how these Christians love one another." St. Paul would say to the people of Philippi, "I thank my God every time I remember you. ... It is right for me to feel this way about all of you since I have you in my heart. ... God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge, in depth of insight" (*Phil 1:3-9*).

Mutual Love

Friendship requires mutual love. God reached out to us, and, thus, we were able to correspond. We love him because *he first loved us* (1 John 4:19). Man corresponds by accepting God's love, opening his soul to him, allowing himself to be loved and expressing his won love in deeds.

The essence of the friendship between God and men is to be founding the nature of charity, which is a supernatural gift. *God's love has been poured into our hearts* (cf *Rom 5:5*). This gift allows us to love God with the same love by which he loves us. Jesus says to us, *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love* (John 15:9). Jesus prays to his Father: *That the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them* (John 17:26). The Christian's joy is rooted in the sure knowledge that God loves him. For God said: *You are my friends ...* (John 15:13-14). What a great joy it is to be able to call ourselves 'friends of God'!

Friends of God

In the course of his earthly life Our Lord was always open to friendship with those who approached him. On some occasions it was He who took the initiative to bring people to himself, as in the cases of Zacchaeus and that of the Samaritan woman. He was a friend to his disciples, and they were quite aware of his concern. When they didn't understand something, they would draw close to him with confidence, as is shown in today's Gospel. They ask the Lord: *Explain to us the parable ...* (Matt 13:36-43). So the Lord takes them apart and reveals to them the meaning of his teachings. The disciples joined in Christ's happiness and in Christ's worries. Christ encouraged them whenever necessary.

In a like manner the Lord now offers his friendship to us from the Tabernacle. There He will console us, encourage us, pardon us. From the Tabernacle, as in the *tent of meeting*, the Lord speaks with everyone *face to face, as a man speaks to his friend*. Here the great difference is that our temples house the God made Man, Jesus, the same one who was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary, He who was to die for us on a cross.

Jesus Christ, The Perfect Model of True Friendship

Jesus enjoyed speaking with everyone who came to see him, and with those he met along the road. He took advantage of those moments to enter into souls, to raise up hearts to a higher plane. If the person concerned was well disposed, Jesus would give him or her the grace to be converted and make a commitment to His service.

He also wants to speak with us in the time of prayer. For this to happen, we have to be willing to talk and be open to real friendship. *He himself has changed us from being servants to being friends, as he clearly stated: 'You are my friends if you do what I command you'* (John 15:14). *He has given us a model which we should imitate. As a result, we have to give our willingness as a friend, telling him what we have in our soul and paying close attention to what He carries in his heart. Once we open up our soul, He will reveal his own. The Lord has declared, 'I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you'* (John 15:14). *The true friend hides nothing from his friend. He reveals all of his spirit, just as Jesus poured into the hearts of the Apostles the mysteries of the Father.* (St. Ambrose, *About the work of ministers*).