

Making A Friend of Jesus



Christopher News Notes

IT'S AN ODD CONCEPT IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT: having a friendship with Jesus, the son of the God who created us and everything in the universe. Maybe more strange is the thought that a friendship—that is, a personal relationship—can occur between someone living today and someone who lived 2,000 years ago in ancient Israel. One of the mysteries and miracles of Christianity is that Jesus *does* extend the hand of friendship to us, beyond the time that separates

His earthly ministry and our age—and beyond the Creator/created relationship.

As thousands of saints have attested, a real and genuine friendship with Jesus—just as real as the other friendships you have—is attainable and life-changing. In fact, many would say an intimate relationship with Jesus is a necessary part of the Christian experience, for nothing makes so big a difference in our lives as the friendships we keep. How do we go about making and deepening a friendship with Christ? For that answer, we would do well to listen to those who came before us and walked this path.

What is Friendship?

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, true friendship is based on unselfish love for another person—the “constant, effective desire to do good to another.” The early Christians survived because they took such good care of one another and did not overly concern themselves with the crumbling pagan world around them. All good Christian friendships, states C.S. Lewis, are ultimately friendships in and through Jesus. “Christ, who said to the disciples ‘Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you,’” Lewis writes, “can truly say to every group of Christian friends, ‘You have not chosen one another, but I have chosen you for one another.’”

Scriptures Lead to Friendship

A true friendship with Jesus must begin with getting to know Him through the Scriptures. In the Bible, we begin to get a sense of who Jesus was: His likes and dislikes, His teachings and beliefs, and His actions. What’s more, we see Jesus in relationship with others around Him as friends: the 12 apostles; Mary, Martha, and Lazarus; and John the Baptist. Those human connections were important to Jesus. He had close friendships with ordinary people—people He laughed and wept with, ate and traveled with, and who helped Him in His ministry.

In the Gospels, we hear of Jesus extending His friendship to tax collectors, outsiders, and sinners.

At times, the company He kept scandalized the Pharisees and other so-called “respectable” people of His era, who were wondering why a good teacher and Rabbi would be mingling with riff-raff who were breaking God’s law and commandments. The lesson our Lord presents is that He has come to help those who are in need of His friendship, and nobody is beyond His reach. “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Matthew 9:12-13)

Through the Gospel accounts, we can know what kind of person Jesus was, realize what was important to Him, and understand that the fantastic gift of friendship that was offered to His companions 2,000 years ago is offered to each one of us today.

The Lives of the Saints

Like the stories of those early Apostles and sinners, the lives of the saints offer a roadmap for how to cultivate a friendship with Jesus. Through prayer, study, and action, nearly every one of the saints had developed a close bond with Him. St. Francis of Assisi took a radical step to live the Gospel through poverty, and he was amazed at how many of his friends and others wanted to have that same closeness with Jesus. That’s how the Franciscan Order was born.

St. Catherine of Siena was known to have cultivated such a close friendship with Jesus that she would be heard saying the words of the “Glory Be” prayer: “Glory Be to the Father, and to You, and to the Holy Spirit...” Her prayers and direct conversations with Jesus continued throughout her day.

St. Teresa of Ávila ascribed friendship with Jesus as the key to the spiritual life. She wrote, “If Christ Jesus dwells in a man as his friend and noble leader, that man can endure all things, for Christ helps and strengthens us and never abandons us. He is a true friend.” Other saints encouraged this kind of friendship with Jesus, too. St. Alphonsus de Liguori wrote, “Acquire the habit of speaking to God as if you were alone with Him, familiarly and

A Prayer for Friendship with Jesus

Jesus—You who walked this earth and knew people just like me—help me to grow in deeper friendship with You. Help me to know how much You, and God the Father, love me for who I am and who You created me to be.

Remain close with me throughout my day, in my trials and in my triumphs. And like all good friends, help me to trust that You have my best interests at heart. Help me to know You through Scripture and prayer.

Allow me the grace and honor of reflecting back our friendship in my actions towards my family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors. And help me always to be Your hands and heart when someone in my life needs help and friendship. I ask all this in Your holy name. Amen.

with confidence and love, as to the dearest and most loving of friends. Speak to Him often of your business, your plans, your troubles, your fears—of everything that concerns you. Converse with Him confidently and frankly; for God is not wont to speak to a soul that does not speak to Him.”

Living as a Friend of Jesus

Bishop Robert Barron has much to say about the necessity of conversing with Jesus through prayer. The language of our common prayers actually reveals a closeness between the speaker and God that has been lost in modern English. In the older form of English, Bishop Barron explains, “thee,” “thy,” and “thou” were familiar terms that were only used among family or close acquaintances. Today, those words feel like formal antiquities, but the language of prayers like the “Our Father” and “Hail Mary” were meant to encourage closeness. Even Jesus’ term for God, Abba, is more akin to “Daddy”—a far cry from some of His contemporary’s views of the rather severe Old Testament God.

So the friendship benefits from regular conversation as well as openness and honesty. It also comes from dropping our pretensions, our pride, and whatever may be holding us back. For example, author Gary Zimak's personal habit of worrying about everything was keeping him from trusting in God. Once Zimak got to know Jesus personally, he discovered that he could share his burdens with Jesus as a friend.

Speaking to The Christophers about his book, *Find a Real Friend in Jesus*, Zimak said: "The first step in building that friendship is to simply tell Jesus, 'Lord, tell me what I can do to get to know You better.' Also, start sharing your daily thoughts and needs with Him....Reading Scripture is another important step because it's one of the best ways to listen to the Lord. Start by reading the daily Mass readings or the Gospels...Make some quiet time for Him and say, 'Lord, speak to me and let me know You're there.' You're going to hear Him speak in the silence of your heart. You'll get thoughts, not necessarily in audible words, but given enough time, He will speak to you."

A friendship with Jesus does not stay between the two of you. This is a friendship that changes all of our relationships for the better. True friendships begun in Christ will widen our circle of friends and call others towards us, as we all seek to follow in the Savior's footsteps.

Reflecting on Christian friendship in *America* magazine, Monsignor Peter J. Vaghi writes: "Jesus is forever our 'companion' along the way of life. The


**"It's better to light one candle
than to curse the darkness."**

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Latin roots of the word, *cum pane*, mean 'with bread,' and we know that Jesus' companionship is ultimately revealed in the bread of life, the Eucharist. Jesus is still walking with us on that most famous road to Emmaus, where we come to know Him in the breaking of the bread. He is also walking with us on the way to Calvary, our little Calvarys that daily reveal themselves to us in our sicknesses, broken relationships, our losses of loved ones and employment and daily loneliness and frustration and ultimately death."

Friendship with Jesus does not mean our life will be without trials, but it means we will have His support when we do encounter those inevitable moments of hardship. In those moments, we can be Christ for one another, leaning on each other and sharing in the joys and sorrows of the Christian life. For to be a follower of Jesus means that we are to serve one another as if the other was Christ. In that way is our friendship with Jesus made real, and made a true grace, to the world around us.

Friendship with Christ will spread and be evident in the way we relate to other people in our lives. As all friends who spend lots of time together, the love of one's friends tends to make the people more alike in ways and manners.

Growing in friendship with Jesus will help us grow closer in friendship with one another, as we take on Christ and reflect His love towards each other in words and deeds. That will become evident in the ways we treat each other, which will draw others to want to know about Jesus—just as the first Apostles and saints did when they went out to spread the Good News of Christianity!

*"I do not call you servants any longer,
because the servant does not know
what the master is doing; but I have
called you friends, because I have made
known to you everything that I have
heard from My Father."* —John 15:15