

Finding Christ in Community



Christopher News Notes

LONELINESS. It's an emotion felt by everyone at some point in their lives.

That's because we were made for relationship from the very beginning—in the creation story, God saw that it wasn't good for Adam to be alone, so He made him a companion, Eve.

God knows that human hearts seek each other in relationship. In fact, the Holy Trinity is proof of this; the love between the Father and Son is so great that it creates a third person, the Holy Spirit. Both spiritually and physically, community is as necessary for a human being as air and water.

New Friendship Leads to Healing

Two young women, best friends, went to dinner one evening. The first young woman had just moved to a new city to be close to her fiancé. But no sooner had her furniture been arranged when he broke up with her. That's when the second woman hopped on a plane to support her heart-broken friend.

There was a long wait for a table, so the pair decided to drink a cocktail at the bar. As they sat down, they noticed that the sweet-faced, elderly woman sitting next to them with her husband was wearing a Miraculous Medal on her bracelet. Both Catholics, the girls commented on her accessory. By the time a table was ready, the elderly couple had heard the whole story of the painful breakup, and immediately took the young woman under their wing. They got her phone number, invited her over for dinner often, introduced her to new friends, and sent her loving cards in the mail for holidays and birthdays.

The young woman later recounted, "In a time when I was so alone and lost in a new city, a simple conversation opened up a whole path to healing. I felt so loved by these people who truly took a stranger into their hearts and embraced her. It not only nourished my physical and emotional needs, but showed me what the face of Christ looks like, and inspired me to be that person to others."

No Man Is an Island

When we think about relationships, it is important to think first not about human ones, but of spiritual ones. If we nourish our love for God, our desire to love and be loved within our community will flow naturally, just like the young woman who, after being "adopted" by the couple, herself became more aware of how to share Christ's love.

Thomas Merton, an American Trappist theologian and mystic, penned a book in 1955 called *No Man Is an Island*. He eloquently explains why man must

Four ways to combat loneliness:

- 1. Find like-minded people.** What is your passion? Faith activities? Rock climbing or ice skating, cooking or writing? Recognize what fills you with joy, and seek out others who enjoy the same things. Thanks to modern technology, it is easier than ever to find and connect with groups who enjoy the same things you do in your community.
- 2. Recognize that loneliness is a feeling, not a fact.** When one is lonely, one may feel, "I am unlovable," or "No one cares for me." While these feelings are understandable, you must grasp your inner worth. You are a beloved child of God, and even though you may experience loneliness, there are people who love you. Think about who they are, and be sure to keep your relationships with them thriving.
- 3. Be open to the counsel of others.** If you find yourself in a rut and unable to break out of it, consider seeking a spiritual director, life coach or therapist. Sometimes it is hard to find solutions on your own.
- 4. Open yourself to others.** Look around and see who else is lonely. Perhaps there is a young adult sitting alone in the pew at church Sunday after Sunday. Invite him over for dinner. Or maybe there is a neighbor who has a hard time getting out and could use a shopping trip. Friendships are like love—the more you share, the more it multiplies!

first love God above all else before his human relationships will mean anything.

"The man who fears to be alone will never be anything but lonely, no matter how much he may surround himself with people. But the man who learns, in solitude and recollection, to be at peace with his own loneliness, and to prefer its reality to the illusion of merely natural companionship, comes to know the invisible companionship of God," he wrote. "Such a one is alone with God in all places, and he alone truly enjoys the companionship of other men, because he loves them in God in Whom their presence is not tiresome, and because of Whom his own love for them can never know satiety."

Jesus gives us the divine paradox in Matthew 16:25 that "whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it." To slightly paraphrase, to find a friend, we must first "lose ourselves" and be a friend.

Thomas Merton said in *No Man Is an Island*, that "it is therefore of supreme importance that we consent to live not for ourselves but for others. When we do this we will be able first of all to face and accept our own limitations." Community

is not only satisfying, but it calls us to holiness, too!

He continued, "If we live for others, we will gradually discover that no one expects us to be 'as gods.' We will see that we are human, like everyone else, that we all have weaknesses and deficiencies, and that these limitations of ours play a most important part in all our lives. It is because of them that we need others and others need us. We are not all weak in the same spots, and so we supplement and complete one another, each one making up in himself for the lack in another."

How beautiful is this gift of community that brings us joy!

A Widower's New Friend

Little Norah Wood of Augusta, Georgia, showed that community transcends accidentals such as age, as documented in a heartwarming story by CNN from November 18, 2016. Norah was shopping with her mother, Tara. It was her birthday and the four-year-old was extraordinarily excited. It was then she spotted a little old man shopping by himself. Norah said to him, "Hi, old person! It's my birthday!"

"He stopped in his tracks, smiled, and said, 'Well hello, little lady! How old are you today?'" recalled Tara, who learned that the gentleman's name was Dan. "They chatted for a couple of minutes, and we went our separate ways."

The little exchange would've been heartwarming enough, but Norah was not done with him yet. As her mother propelled her around the store, Norah insisted that she wanted to take her picture with "Mr. Dan," as she called him. So they sought him out again. Tara recalled, "He teared up and said... 'This has been the best day I've had in a long time. You've made me so happy, Ms. Norah.'"

But that still wasn't the end of their story. Tara posted the story on her Facebook page. After it went viral, someone messaged her, saying that Mr. Dan was her friend and that he'd just lost his wife, and was very lonely. So Tara and Norah called Mr. Dan and decided to pay him a visit. "They came by the house, and sure enough, she grabbed me and hugged me like there was no tomorrow," said Mr. Dan (whose real name is Dan Peterson).

"Norah brought him a framed picture of the two of them in the grocery store, pictures she colored (he put them on his fridge!) and a bag full of pastries and Butterfingers," said Tara. And after that first visit, continued Tara, Norah asked to visit Mr. Dan every day after school. They don't exactly do that, but they call him at least once a week.

Mr. Dan says Norah's timing couldn't have been better. "It was one of those days that I'm on my

own little private pity party," he said. "And I'm feeling sorry for myself and doubting my beliefs and it obviously changed my opinion that day and lifted my spirits to heights that I hadn't known for a long time."

That was life-changing. Tara explained: "He said that he hadn't had an uninterrupted night of sleep for the past several months. Sadness and anxiety had made his mind wander at night, but since meeting Norah, he has slept soundly every single night. He said she healed him."

Thankfully, there are countless heartwarming stories highlighting community between different age groups. Blogger Sophia Swinford featured a news video from the BBC about how the UK is trying to address the isolation in which many elderly people find themselves.

One of those people is 95-year-old Florence, who said she was "bored to tears" before her roommate, 27-year-old Alexandra, moved in. The two met as part of a "home-share program that provides companionship for elderly adults by pairing them with London students in need of low-cost housing," reported the website Aleteia.

Florence is partially blind and said that after her husband died and her children moved away, she found herself "looking at four walls and thinking 'what am I going to do now?'" But now she says, "You cannot believe the difference that it makes just hearing somebody in the house. And, to me, now to hear the key in the lock 'round about 6 o'clock at night is wonderful."

But Florence isn't the only one feeling less alone. Alexandra says that the program has provided her with a new friend, Florence, and a place to feel safe in a new city.

Wherever we find true friendship and community, we find Jesus. Let's each try to be Christ for someone today.


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

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*"We have all known the long loneliness, and we
have found that the answer is community."*

—Dorothy Day