

From the desk of Fr. Tim

The Value of Friends (Part 2)

Once again, we will approach the subject of friendship here. In reality, this is a huge subject with many dimensions. For those who are watchful over human society and culture, it is one of the most interesting considerations, if friendship is common or not. Some consider it as rare as diamonds. Others may find it completely illusive and complain that this or that group is the most unfriendly folks they have ever met, implying perhaps that they are this way by nature. Friendships may be hard to find, and even harder to maintain, but I think it is completely false that people are naturally unfriendly. Friendship has to do with choices.

We might consider some of the characteristics of friendship. Actually each of these is a choice that we make or an action that we commit. As we said last time, friendship is born in the sharing of a common goal. Strong parishes are formed in part by people working side by side, forming a vision and working to accomplish it. True friendship is guided by certain principals. They are not necessarily natural impulses, but decisions that are made to accept this guidance. For example, the common goal that first motivates friendship must be to do good, not evil. Thieves cannot be true friends simply because the goal is to do evil, to satisfy selfish motives. True friendship is not selfish. In fact, one of the key facets of the relationship is the good of the other. Friends love each other despite faults and flaws.

One of the great errors of contemporary society is the idea that all friendship is dependent on sensual love. Of course, the perversion of sensuality and friendship are well documented. Both the loneliness of modern man and the misunderstanding of the role of sexuality have led to a deep sense of brokenness in our society. So many lost souls have gone off in search of meaning and imagined that the tool to acceptance and friendship is human sexuality. In the quiet desperation of a little study they gaze into a computer screen imagining that the image reflected there can somehow provide fulfillment. In that same desperation, the powerful benefit of friendship can be warped into a selfish vehicle for pleasure. And the benefit of friendship is lost.

Properly approached, friendship can be a powerful aid to our spiritual development, our pursuit of perfection. The trust and confidence that develops in a true friendship can help us see beyond our self-deception, obtain genuinely sincere counsel and advice, and the assurance that this is given with a true sense of concern for our well being. We all need the encouragement that friendship can bring. The meager beginnings of a unique giftedness can be brought to fruition by a friend.

I think it is right to think in one sense of the parish church as a society of friends. Some might argue that in our contemporary setting, the parish is too large for that, but it is not a matter of numbers of people but of the intent and motivation. I am sure that sometimes people say that this or that program does not exactly meet their needs. They might find the

presentations boring, old fashioned or too avant-garde. Catholic parishes are generally neither slick nor very up to date. Some people try to make them that way, but they end up looking silly, mainly because we are organized around something else that others do not have. We have the sacraments, the power of Christ present as the crucified Lord, and we have the very clearly stated call to become saints. Both are intended to help us come to the joy of being disciples. And the object of our growth in perfection is our relationships with one another.

Much of what happens in the parish is simply to put us together, in one place, on the same track, so that we can learn to share something of our life together. The power of these relationships is unparalleled. They are true jewels of our life's experience. They are worth protecting and nurturing. Whatever we may be sharing is almost secondary to those with whom we share it.

So, what is the moral of all this? We need to be involved. Isolation, inactivity, detachment are hard to justify when we are compelled to grow in our holiness together. I am convinced that when we have come close to a community of friends, the devil will immediately begin to try to distract us, persuade us away, or even put into our mind that our association with others is fruitless or wrong. We need to resist by remaining involved, constant in our devotion to our friends.

How good it is, how pleasant, where the people dwell as one! Like precious ointment on the head, running down upon the beard, Upon the beard of Aaron, upon the collar of his robe. Like dew of Hermon coming down upon the mountains of Zion. There the LORD has lavished blessings, life for evermore!

Psalm 133:1-3