

OCTOBER 10, 2019

Thursday of the 27th Week of Ordinary Time Weekday

Mal 3:13-20b

Ps 1:1-4,6

Lk 11:5-13

In today's Gospel (Lk 11:5-13), the theme of friendship is prominent. The Gospels are rich in examples of Jesus approaching others in friendship. St. Luke shows a compassionate Jesus who approaches the lepers, paralytics, sinners, tax collectors, centurions, widows, those possessed by demons, epileptics – the list is long. Jesus himself is the good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37) and the compassionate father (Lk 15:11-32). He extends his merciful hand of friendship generously and spontaneously.

The Gospel of John also provides profound insights on Jesus and friendship. The friendship-love of Jesus for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus is described in the eleventh chapter: "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus" (Jn 11:5). When Jesus is informed of the death of Lazarus, he says, "Our friend Lazarus is asleep" (Jn 11:11), and later Jesus weeps at the death of his friend; "the Jews said, 'See how he loved him'" (Jn 11:36).

At the Last Supper, offering us the commandment to love one another, Jesus says: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you" (Jn 15:13-16). Thus, Jesus manifests the depth of his friendship-love by dying on the cross for us. As St. Paul notes, "God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).

Everyone is called to experience that Jesus is the friend, indeed the personal friend, of every human being. Friendship with Christ means growing in intimacy with the Master, as well as an existence in Christ. Such a profound dimension of friendship revitalizes the Holy Spirit within us. Friendship with Christ, even in sickness and frailty, offers us a strength that prevails over bitterness, the fatigue of life, and all despair. Friendship is a "matter of heart," in which one reveals to the other what is in the depths of one's heart, with trust and reciprocity. Growth in friendship happens through mutual self-revelation. In this process, we find ourselves involved in a deeper relationship with God and our neighbour. People will be encouraged to follow Christ when they see how his friendship has personally transformed the missionary disciple who proclaims and witnesses.

The friendship described to us by today's Gospel seems insufficient to obtain what we seek. Our need must be supported by the insistence of the request, by the certainty of the faith of the one who asks, and in the ability to give by the one who is asked, even at inopportune moments. The insistence on praying always, without ever tiring (see Lk 18:1), tests and reinforces faith as a relationship of friends, or even of parent and child. The loaves and the Holy Spirit clearly mentioned in the prayer offer clear eucharistic and baptismal connotations of friendship with Jesus and of the relationship with his Father. "The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings. And the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because it intercedes for the holy ones according to God's will" (Rom 8:26-27).

The insistence of the request for three loaves to share with a guest underlines the communion that nourishes and takes care of one's neighbour. Prayer, if authentic, opens the relationship of friendship with God towards the neighbour and pushes us to mission. We ask for our own needs as well as for those of others, through the Church that we become through the Spirit of the Father and the Eucharistic bread that we share. We never ask for ourselves alone; that would not be prayer. We ask because it increases our communion with others and expands the boundaries of the community of Jesus. In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis emphasizes, "The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus" (n. 1). Francis continues, "Thanks solely to this encounter – or renewed encounter – with God's love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption.... Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization" (n. 8). We are "those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself" (n. 27). Pope Francis believes that "we were created for what the Gospel offers us: friendship with Jesus and love of our brothers and sisters" (n. 265). Our missionary faith "has to be sustained by our own constantly renewed experience of savouring Christ's friendship and his message" (n. 266).

Pope Francis often uses a simple and useful description of the mission: "Mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people" (EG 268). This means that every missionary who experiences a profound encounter with Jesus through personal friendship will want to share with others the fruits of this encounter. Starting from a personal encounter with God, we then desire to be friends with others in sharing their friendship with the Lord Jesus.