

❖ Other Voices ❖

The word *friend* has such a range of meanings that one might wonder whether it has become vacuous. To give it some content we might need to speak of close friends, bridge friends, work friends, intimate friends, childhood friends, and casual friends. Most of us have probably received our share of bulk-mail pleas for contributions saluting us as “Dear Friend.” I have participated in more than one congregation’s “Ritual of Friendship,” consisting of writing my name and address on a pad and passing it to the stranger next to me. Yet...in the jumble of relationships denoted by this elastic term *friend* there *are* relationships precious enough to elicit deep gratitude and reverence.

CAROLINE J. SIMON, *The Disciplined Heart*

There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24). If, therefore, you seek a true friend, seek Christ, who, when all others have deserted you, will not forsake you, neither in life, nor in death, nor in time, nor in eternity. To the contrary – always and everywhere he will draw near to you, and he will crown you with all good, all grace, and all glory. How wise was that soul who was able to say: *My mind is founded and strengthened in Christ!* Christ is a man of love precisely because he is a man of sorrow; for without sorrow nothing in love comes to fullness of life. *In peace*, which is to say, *in himself I will sleep and rest.*

CORNELIUS A LAPIDE (1567-1637), *Commentarii in Sacram Scripturam*

Christ did not lay down his life for us as enemies so that we should remain enemies, but so that he could make us friends.

THOMAS AQUINAS (1225-1274), *Lectures on the Gospel of John*

To speak of friendship with God can sound so cozy and consoling, as if we are all snuggling up to God; however, there is no riskier vulnerability than to live in friendship with God, because every friendship changes us, because friends have expectations of each other, and because friends are said to be committed to the same things.... Any friend of God is called to faithfully embody the ways of God in the world, even to the point of suffering on account of them. There may be grace and glory in being a friend of God, but there is also clearly a cost.

PAUL J. WADELL, *Becoming Friends*

Let us reveal our bosom to [a friend], and let him reveal his to us. Therefore, [Jesus] said, I have called you friends, because all that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you. Therefore a friend hides nothing, if he is true; he pours forth his mind, just as the Lord Jesus poured forth the mysteries of the Father.

AMBROSE OF MILAN (339-397), *On the Duties of Ministers*, 3.22.135

[Christ] demands from us what he himself offers. If he strips himself before our eyes, he claims that we should do the same. As our God he knows every fiber of the being which he has made; as our Savior he knows every instant in the past in which we have swerved from his obedience; but, as our friend, he waits for us to tell him.

It is tolerably true to say that the difference between our behavior, respectively, to an acquaintance and to a friend, is that in the first case we seek to conceal ourselves, to present an agreeable or a convenient image of our own character, to use language as a disguise, to use conversation as we might use counters; and in the second case that we put aside conventions and make-shifts, and seek to express ourselves as we are, and not as we would have our friend think us to be.

ROBERT HUGH BENSON (1871-1914), *The Friendship of Christ*

So this is what is so marvelous about friendship: it takes two persons to have this action and interaction. You don't have one person loving the other person and understanding her, but you have two persons accepting each other, loving each other, and growing in affection for each other, in mature affection that accepts elements that do not evoke affection.

MOTHER MARY FRANCIS, P.C.C., *But I Have Called You Friends*

Faithfulness to us in our faults is a certain sign of fidelity in a friend. You may depend upon that man who will tell you of your faults in a kind and considerate manner. Fawning hypocrites, insidious flatterers, are the sweepings and offal of friendship. They are but the parasites upon that noble tree. But true friends put enough trust in you to tell you openly of your faults. Give me for a friend the man who will speak honestly of me before my face; who will not first tell one neighbor, then another, but who will come straight to my house and say, "Sir, I feel there is such-and-such a thing I must tell you of." That man is a true friend; he has proved himself to be so.

CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON (1834-1892), "A Faithful Friend"

There are no reliable rules or recipes to follow with regard to admonition and advice within friendship; that is why it requires good judgment.... Mature friendship both requires and produces growth in goodness, not as friendship's goal, but in order to equip us for befriending. Being a friend requires strength of character. As we strive to do what friendship calls for,

we will grow. Sharing our friends' sorrows will exercise our endurance and courage. There may be parts of our friends' unfolding stories to which we can give little direct help. In some cases we lack resources or expertise to aid our friends' particular cherished projects. In other cases they do not yet see what we think we see about God's intentions for them.

CAROLINE J. SIMON, *The Disciplined Heart*

Soul friendships emerge out of the fertile soil of knowing and being known. Soul friends can help us know ourselves better by mirroring to us the truth of who we are.... When a friendship is going beyond ordinary levels of intimacy and moving into more spiritual territory, two...areas become important to share with a soul friend: our areas of struggle and, even more specifically, our areas of wrongdoing. Soul friends share the joys of life as well as the struggles, and their ability to both divulge and respond to a confession opens the door to radical transformation.

MINDY CALIGUIRE, *Spiritual Friendship*

So that a human being might not be alone a system of friendship was created. Friendship begins with one's spouse and children, and from there moves on to strangers. But considering the fact that we all have the same father (Adam) and the same mother (Eve) who will be a stranger? Every human being is neighbor to every other human being. Ask nature: is this man unknown? He is still a human being. Is this woman a friend? Let her remain a friend. Is this man an enemy? Let him become a friend.

AUGUSTINE (354-430), *Sermon 229D, 1*

Our choice of friends and our attachment to them may be exclusive without being exclusivistic.... To devote time, energy, and concern to one's friends is not active concern for all human beings, but it can be chosen and done in a way which remains open to all neighbors or in a way which does not. Only the latter is forbidden.

GILBERT C. MEILAENDER, *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics*

[A]ccording to the Christian story, at least on this side of eternity, neighbor love *is* something other than friendship. *Caritas* is the love based on an infinite hope that someday everyone will be God's friend; in the meantime, God, like everyone else, has fewer friends than neighbors.

CAROLINE J. SIMON, *The Disciplined Heart*

This is that extraordinary and great happiness which we await.... There one finds no hiding of thoughts, no dissembling of affection. This is true and eternal friendship, which begins in this life and is perfected in the next, which here belongs to the few where few are good, but there belongs to all where all are good.

AELRED OF RIEVAULX (1110-1167), *Spiritual Friendship, 3.79-80*