

REFLECTION FOR FRIDAY 5th WEEK OF EASTER

Acts 15:22-31 John 15:12-17

We all value friendship. We have a deep need to befriend someone and to be befriended by someone. When a couple who are married regard one another as their closest friend, the marriage is likely to be happy and to last.

Friendship is one of the great blessings of life. If we are fortunate to have even one good friend, we consider it a blessing. We can be ourselves with our friends. We can open our hearts to them, knowing that we will not be judged but understood and accepted.

Friendship is a form of love that everyone can experience, whether married or not. The Jewish Scriptures, especially the Wisdom books, have a lot to say about friendship. It is regarded there as a gift from God.

According to the Book of Sirach, 'Faithful friends are a sturdy shelter: whoever finds one has found a treasure'. It is out of this Jewish tradition of the value of friendship that Jesus says to his disciples in today's gospel reading, 'I call you friends'.

Jesus declares there that he expresses his friendship for his disciples, for all of us, in two ways. He has befriended us by giving us his life, laying down his life for us. He has also befriended us by revealing to us what is deepest and most precious to him, his love and knowledge of God his Father, 'I have made known to you everything I have learned from my Father'.

During the second world war in a Nazi concentration camp, Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish priest, gave his life so that a fellow prisoner, a married man, might live. He befriended that man in the most radical way possible. His act of friendship is a living sign of how Jesus befriends us.

The Lord has befriended each one of us. He has chosen each one of us. 'You did not choose me, no, I chose you'. We have been befriended by the Lord, chosen by him, out of love.

In any human friendship, two people have to keep choosing one another. If only one person chooses the other, but is not chosen in return, the friendship will die. That is not the case with the Lord's friendship of us. He continues to choose us, even when we do not choose him. Yet, he wants us to choose him, and he waits for us to do so. The question the risen Lord addressed to Peter is addressed to us all, 'Do you love me?' If we answer 'yes' to that question, as Peter did, the Lord will ask us to live out our love of him by loving one another as he has loved us, by befriending one another as he has befriended us, to encourage one another as he has encouraged them. The Lord encourages us so that we can encourage one another. We firstly need to open ourselves to the Lord's encouraging presence and in the strength of that grace go forth and encourage all that is good in each other.

Fr Patrick