

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time C
Friendship with the Lord Jesus: Presence, Time, and Attention

Genesis 18:1-10a; Psalm 15:2-3,3-4,5; Colossians 1:24-28; Luke 10:38-42

Dear brothers and sisters,

Happy 94th parish foundation anniversary!

On July 19, 1931, St. Theresa Church was officially established as a parish, and several months later, in the same year, the St. Theresa School was founded. Later, it was elevated to the status of a Co-Cathedral on July 28, 1985.

Let us remember that the Church is not simply an institution, a structured community, or a religious group. It is, first of all, a mystery of love and devotion to the person of Jesus, and everything else in the church must start & flow from this. So, when we say "happy anniversary," we can also say "happy anniversary, my love!" We are a people gathered and united by the love of Jesus, sanctified and elevated into His mystical Body through His passion, death, and resurrection.

Together with the whole Church, we continue to respond to the invitation of the Jubilee Year to reflect that we are Pilgrims of Hope. Hope, the source of our joy, is found in Jesus. Jesus is our Hope.

Two Sundays ago, we reflected on the fundamental questions of the pilgrim of hope: How are you? Where are you? And who are you? These questions are not about our physical state, location, or personal information. When we viewed them through the lens of faith, our answers take on a deeper meaning. They are about our spiritual journey as pilgrims of hope, our relationship with God, and our identity as His children.

How are you? We respond, "I am blessed," because we live by the grace of God, not by good luck or bad luck. Where are you? We say, "Here I am, Lord, I come to do your will," because we don't just believe in God, we obey him. And who are you? We say, "I am a child of God." We claim and proclaim the truth of who we are and how we become through the Sacrament of Baptism.

The story of the Good Samaritan, who helped the person in need, last Sunday, beautifully articulates the values of who we are in the Lord. Please let us place our hands over our hearts, and let us proclaim: "I am blessed. I come to do the will of God. I am a child of God. Therefore, it is my privilege and a joy to help."

Our relationship with Jesus sustains this truth. Just as some people want to have "me time" to find rest from stress and work, I think it is needful to have "Jesus' time," a dedicated period for prayer, reflection, and communion with Jesus, which requires presence and attention. This "Jesus' time" does not take away our need for "me time," because He promised us that if we come to Him, we will find rest. "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28).

How is your time with the Lord? How is your friendship with Jesus? Friendship requires time, presence, and attention; without these, friendship can't grow. Let us reflect on these questions through the two parallel stories recounted in the first reading and the Gospel -- one at the mountain of Mamre and the other in the village of Bethany.

Abraham and Sarah's hospitality towards the three strangers, rooted in their faith in God, led to a miraculous reward. Their barrenness was transformed into fertility, as Sarah conceived a son. This awe-inspiring event reminds us that divine visitation often occurs through ordinary means, like meeting a stranger or someone in need of help. And the hospitality we extend to someone will not go unnoticed; there is always a reward. As Jesus said, "whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink—amen, I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward" (cf. Matt 10:42). There is a blessing for being hospitable!

On the other hand, the hospitality that occurred in the village of Bethany was nurtured and grew out of friendship. Martha, Mary, and their brother Lazarus are close family friends of Jesus, much like Abraham and Sarah were friends of God. One can notice the closeness of the family to Jesus through their gestures and dialogue. It's

casual, honest, and friendly. Martha, inundated with the work in the kitchen, honestly expressed her concern to Jesus, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me' (Lk 10:40). She would not tell Jesus this way if he were not a close friend, and who would not understand her complaint if all she wants is to give the best hospitality to her guests? Yes, she seemed to be anxious at the moment. Jesus, a dear friend, must have smiled while looking at and listening to Martha's complaint. His response, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is a need for only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken from her" (Lk 10:41-42). His response did not discredit Martha's legitimate concern. He did not take it lightly, but he made it an occasion to teach the beauty of friendship. He made Mary's disposition an ideal of friendship.

Friendship is always the gift of our being. It is not what you have offered but how much you give your time, presence, and attention, without which, friendship is at risk, weakens, or dies. Hence, the value of friendship is not in material things. It is an encounter from person to person, celebrating each other's being. You can buy friends and multiply them with material gifts, but you will never win their hearts and genuine loyalty.

Time, presence, and attention are necessary elements of friendship. They are also essential for community and family life to grow. They create a lasting memory, or better still, make a profoundly beautiful memory. They are to be understood as one reality. It is the "one thing" mentioned by our Lord Jesus that should not be taken for granted. The "one thing" that is essential in our relationship with him -- time, presence, and attention. The "one thing" that the Lord recognizes as the "better part" and that should not be taken away from our daily lives.

St. Gregory beautifully summed up this story of Martha and Mary. He said, "Martha signifies the active life as she busily labors to honor Christ through her work. Mary exemplifies the contemplative life as she sits attentively to listen and learn from Christ. While both activities are essential to Christian living, the latter is greater than the former. In heaven, the active life terminates, while the contemplative life reaches its perfection."

Our lives as friends of Jesus flow from this "one thing" that is not to be taken for granted, or disregarded, but must be practiced. This "one thing" is the source of grace to persevere. Because of this "one thing," St. Paul proclaims his confidence to us being God's steward, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church, of which I am a minister in accordance with God's stewardship given to me to bring to completion for you the word of God, the mystery hidden from ages and generations past" (Col. 1:24-26). Also, without this "one thing," it would be deceiving to claim Jesus is our friend.

Let us not allow the day to pass without spending time with Jesus. It is where genuine hospitality is nurtured and grows, and where perseverance in the face of life's challenges and our care for others in his name is nourished and sustained.

Happy 94th parish foundation anniversary!

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Pastor