

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 9TH, 2021 Gregory Brenninkmeijer SJ

on Mark 10, 17 – 27

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Have you got a friend, my dear people? I do not mean someone whom you enjoy having a beer with and exchanging the latest gossip. Nothing wrong with that, but no, I mean a real friend. Someone who is part of your life. Someone who feels how you are doing and to whom you give a real answer when he or she asks: "How are you?" I am sure that you know what I mean. It is wonderful to see and to know couples, who not only have become husband and wife, not only have become partners, but who have really become best friends. It is a relationship in which you want to be known by your partner as you really are and for whom you do not want to have secrets. Secrets tend to sow divisions, while real friends will let nothing come between them.

I have been thinking quite a lot about the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. We regularly witness them in a teacher - pupil relationship. Jesus is teaching them about God, about the Kingdom of God and about his own future in God. But his disciples find it difficult to understand what He is talking about, yet do not dare to ask Him what He meant. We see Jesus as the leader and the disciples as the followers. He decides where they are going. He sends them ahead to prepare his arrival or to prepare a meal. It even happens that Jesus let's them partake in his work. He sends them out to preach that the Kingdom of God is near, or He makes them distribute the bread He blessed, which would feed five thousand men.

But Jesus also wants to know what his disciples make of Him. He asks them what people say about Him, but his real question is: 'Who do you say that I am?' Often did He let them feel that He knew them well. He tells Nathanaël that he is a real Israëlite incapable of deceit. He predicts that Peter and Andrew will become fishers of men, and the day He saw Levi at his taxoffice He called him to follow, knowing that this Levi would become a dedicated Matthew. Jesus knew his disciples well when He asked them: "And who do you think I am?" Jesus also wants to be known. Not by everyone, who would only draw the wrong conclusions, but by these friends of his, whose feet He would wash and who He did not call servants or pupils, but who He called his friends, because He had told them everything his Father had made known to Him. It is good to think about Jesus as someone who had real friends, men He loved and felt at ease with. Men He trusted and who, through this real human friendship, would remain faithful and, after endless up's and down's, would give their life for Him.

Today's gospel tells us of a young man who approaches Jesus with the question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" He probably was a very good, talented young man, who had everything he could wish for, but who nevertheless was not content with his life, was not really happy. I think that in all his prosperity he felt lonely. What he was looking for was a real friend, a friend money can't buy. Having listened to Jesus and having watched Him for some time he feels drawn to Him. Perhaps this might be the person, the friend he was looking for. And after the first exchange of question and answer the evangelist tells us something special. He tells us that Jesus looked at the young man lovingly. We would say there was a real click. And Jesus offers him his friendship, offers him to become part of this circle of very special friends. You are welcome, Jesus says, if you can free yourself of all those belongings that burden you and prevent you from becoming the fulfilled and happy man you would love to be.

Can you try to imagine what went on in this young man's mind and heart hearing Jesus' words? Of course he had felt Jesus' love for him. Of course he felt the click between them. Yes, he knew that Jesus was really trying to free him of the bondage of his material goods and wealthy lifestyle, which never gave him real satisfaction. But he could not do it. He was too deeply attached to his worldly goods. Marc tells us that his face fell and he went away sad. Jesus too is disappointed. He had taken a real liking to the man. And looking at his disciples He says: "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God." "To human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God!"

This, my dear people, is a story from the gospel that makes us feel uneasy. We feel, we know that it is not offered to us this Sunday because it is such a touching story from the life of Jesus. It is read to us today because the Church wants us to reflect a moment on our own life and lifestyle. Am I here tonight because it is weekend and that is what I always do at the weekend, go to Mass, listen to Vincent singing and playing and get a real good weekend-feeling? Or am I here tonight because I want to meet up again with Jesus, hear his words, partake in his body and blood, offered up for us. Do I want to ask Him what I need to do to become a member of his circle of friends. Am I looking for a more meaningful life, and do I hope that He will be able to help me achieve that? The answer you will get from Jesus will be the same as the answer the rich young man got. Jesus will look at you lovingly and bid you welcome, as soon as you have freed yourself from what binds you and prevents you from following in Jesus' footsteps. There are many obstacles, attachments, that seem to be more urgent, more important, more binding. Jesus is inviting me and you again today. He promises us a fulfilled and meaningful life, the Kingdom of God. It obviously is not easy to enter. But we do not want to walk away sad. Help us, dear Lord, to free ourselves for your service. Amen.

