

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Feb 24th 2017

One evening while chatting with my law school roommates, Pete asked me how many friends I thought I had, and I told him I probably had 25 or more. He was amazed and replied, “I always thought I would be fortunate if I had three or four people I could count on as my friends.”

Now Pete was a well-rounded guy and I was surprised to hear of his low expectations, but then he went on to define just what friendship meant to him. For Pete, a friend was exactly the person described in the first reading from Sirach, “our confidant, a sturdy shelter, a lifesaving remedy, one who fears God and acts accordingly.” After hearing Pete’s description of what a friend was, I realized that I had lots of acquaintances, but I wasn’t really sure how many friends I truly have.

When you read today’s passage from Sirach, did your mind drift and did you start to think about the people you work with, your neighbors, classmates, old and new, or people with whom you serve on committees? Did you consider each a friend because you know their favorite team, the name of their spouse or pet, you have had an occasional lunch with them or you signed up to buy Girl Scout cookies from them? But are they your confidant, your sturdy shelter? In times of distress and worry, are they one of the first people you reach out to for advice and comfort? Maybe not. I venture to say that for most of us, Pete was right. Our spouse and one or two really close friends are likely the ones we will reach out to when the chips are down and we need the advice and comfort of someone, someone we really trust. But fortunately we all have one more friend we can count on through thick or thin—Jesus.

I grew up in a Lutheran home and on Saturday nights, while my dad was waiting for my mom to get ready to go out, he would play the piano and then lower his voice to mimic the great Tennessee Ernie Ford and sing What a Friend We Have in Jesus. The lyrics to the song probably say it best and just how important Jesus is as our friend and how comforting it is that he is called our “friend” vs. our ruler or judge. This makes it so much easier to be truly honest with Him in our thoughts and prayers. Like a true friend, there is no need to be guarded in what we say to Him, out of fear of retaliation or condescension.

So when someone asks you who your close friends are, be sure to include the one who will always, come rain or shine, be at your side – Jesus. Here are the lyrics to the song.

What a Friend We Have in Jesus

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry, everything to God in prayer!

O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,

All because we do not carry, everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?

We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.

Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?

Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?

Precious Savior, still our refuge; take it to the Lord in prayer.

Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer!

In his arms he'll take and shield thee; thou wilt find a solace there.

If you have never heard the song, click on this [YouTube link](#) and enjoy.

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