



Theology Corner

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Theological Reflections by Paul Chutikorn - Director of Faith Formation

“What Does it Mean to be in a Friendship with God?”

In the previous article, I mentioned how grace restores us into a “friendship” with God. This prompted a reader to ask, “What exactly *is* friendship, and what does it mean to be in a friendship with God?” There are two things to consider regarding friendship in general. The first is that any true friendship must involve an unselfish love for another person. One way to describe this is that friendship involves a love for another person as a *subject* rather than as an object. That is simply to say that true love is to love someone based on their inherent goodness, rather than on utility or pleasure of some kind. Love of pleasure and utility is not much different than a love that one can have for wine. In a true friendship, which again is one based on goodness, we wish good to the other person. Now, it would be absurd to wish good upon wine because a love for wine can only be one which has its basis either in utility or pleasure (e.g., it helps you relax, tastes good, etc.). Whereas with another person, we can truly love what is good in that person without reference to the benefit that we derive from it.

It is not difficult to see how this applies to friendship with God. We know that God loves us as subjects rather than as objects because God is perfect in himself. He does not *need* us in order to be happy or fulfilled. Yet, he desires union with us anyway because he wishes to communicate his goodness to us. So, the strength of our friendship with God depends upon whether we love him back in this same way (i.e., love him for who he is). Just as a friendship with other human beings progressively strengthens inasmuch as we gain greater knowledge of the person and his/her qualities, in a similar way, we grow in our love of God as we come to know him more through his self-revelation in Jesus Christ, in the Holy Scriptures, and through his Church. Since friendship entails a self-giving, so too does friendship with God entail a total self-giving. In fact, this occurs every time we receive the sacraments. Take the Eucharist for example; Christ meets us in love, offering his whole self (body, blood, soul, and divinity) in the Eucharist, and in receiving the Eucharist, we “commune” with God by uniting our whole self to him with a reciprocating love. This is one aspect of our friendship with God.

The second consideration is that in friendship, there must be some commonality between the two persons. There must be something that can be *shared* between the two. It is this act of sharing that two friends are united. Of course, the degree in which two friends share things with each other varies (e.g., spouses or ordinary friends), but every friend in some way shares their experiences, their love, etc. With God, it is impossible for us to share *commonality by nature* since he is God and we are not. In other words, God is not our friend in the same sense that we are friends with our buddies. Once more, he is God and he does not gain anything from *us*. The way in which we are able to truly become friends with God is through a *commonality by grace*. This happens in baptism as we enter into an adopted filiation (sonship) with God which is only possible by grace as he brings us up into the divine life by sending the Holy Spirit into our soul.

In the beginning, man was created in grace, which means that we were created in a special friendship with God in charity. Due to the Fall, humanity fell out of charity with God and this is why baptism is necessary in order that we can be restored into a friendship with God. But baptism is just the beginning. The friendship has just begun. God will never stop offering himself in friendship, but as we know a friendship requires not one, but *two*. The charity that exists in our soul can be lost through mortal sin when we separate ourselves from this friendship by willfully refusing to hold up *our end* of the friendship. Venial sin, while not destroying charity completely, damages the friendship and places it on rocky ground. Confession is necessary to restore the friendship if we are in mortal sin, but the goal for every Christian is to ensure the friendship is rock solid. How? Frequent reception of the sacraments, frequent prayer, and constantly purifying our minds and hearts so that we continue to share in God’s knowledge by faith and share in his love by the gift of charity. In all of this, it must be understood that while we are friends with God inasmuch as we are in a state of grace, we are not equal with God, rather we are received into his family as son/daughter and heir.