

FRIENDS OF AUGUSTINE

AUGUSTINE FOR TODAY



FRIENDSHIP

THE WORD

A faithful friend is a sure shelter,
whoever finds one has found a rare treasure.
A faithful friend is something beyond price,
there is no measuring that person's worth
A faithful friend is the elixir of life,
and those who fear the Lord will find one.
Whoever fears the Lord makes true friends,
for as a person is, so is the friend.

Si. 6:15 -17.

I call you friends,
because I have made known to you
everything I have learnt from my Father.

Jn. 15:15

God is love
and those who live in love live in God,
and God lives in them.

1Jn. 4:16

FROM AUGUSTINE

Friendship has been rightly and with just reverence defined as "agreement on things human and divine combined with good will and love."

Contra Acad III 13

There is no true friendship unless You weld it between souls that cleave together by the charity poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit

Conf V,19

If you love your brother (or sister) whom you see, by that very fact you will also see God, because you will see charity itself and God dwells in the interior. *In ev lo 17,8*

He loves his friend truly who loves God in him, either because God is already in him or in order that he may be in him. *Sermon 361, 1*

If together with me you hold firmly to these two commandments (love of God and love of neighbour), our friendship will be true and everlasting, and it will unite us not only to one another, but to the Lord himself *Letter 258*

Whenever I feel a person burning with Christian charity and love for me has become my friend, when I entrust any of my plans and thoughts to him, I am entrusting them not to a man, but to Him in whom he abides, so as to be like Him, "for God is love, and the one who lives in love lives in God." *Letter 73*

Not everyone who spares is a friend, nor is everyone who strikes an enemy. "Better are the wounds of a friend than the proffered kisses of an enemy (Ps 27:6) Love mingled with severity is better than deceit with indulgence. *Letter 93*

At the heart of the ministry of Jesus is the building of community. Throughout his life on earth Jesus drew people out of isolation, loneliness and division into unity with God, with each other and within themselves. The divisions of sin are healed in the creation of unity and community. The amazing story of the Fall, given to us in Chapter 3 of the Book of Genesis, is reversed in the mission and ministry of Jesus.

Throughout his life, Augustine sought this unity and community. He searched, as the Confessions vividly portray, for an inner unity, for a discovery of his deepest inner self which was inextricably linked with his search for God. One of the things which is very clear from the Confessions and from other writings, is that, while Augustine had to make this journey to unity himself, he needed to do it in the company of friends.

Friends were of great importance in the life of Augustine. He needed the company of others. In his early life he was prepared to do almost anything in order to be accepted, popular and admired by his peers. His desire to be "one of the boys" led him into many situations which he was later to regret. Even though some of these early "friendships" led him into paths which were, as he understood it, sinful, Augustine did not repudiate the need for friendship. As he matured his concept of true friendship became more and more refined and centred in God. It is not surprising that Augustine gathered round him friends with whom he could share the search for God.

There are in Augustine's thought on friendship a number of key elements:

Friendship is a grace. It comes from God who is the author and giver of friendships.

There is no true friendship unless You weld it between souls that cleave together by the charity poured forth into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.
Conf 5

True friendship springs from the love of God expressed to us in Christ and can only be made secure in Christ.

If souls please you, then love them in God because they are mutable in themselves but in him firmly established; without him they would pass and perish.
Conf 4

Christian friendship is transfigured by grace and so brings union with God.

Love your friends in him, and draw as many souls with you to him as you can, saying to them, "Him let us love."
Conf 4

Friendship will only reach its perfection in heaven.

We shall offer praise, we shall all be one in Christ, directed towards the one God.
En in Ps 147

If true friendship is to flourish, Augustine insists that it must be based on

**truth
honesty
frankness**

No one can truly be a friend to another if that person is not first a friend of the truth . . . When I speak up for your good, I will be more

frank with you the more I am your friend, because I will be all the more a friend the more I am faithful to you. Letter 155

All of Augustine's thought on friendship can, perhaps, be summed up in the wonderful exhortation in the Rule:

My dear brothers and sisters, let us be of one mind and one heart on the way to God. Rule 1:2

POINTS TO PONDER

1. What do Augustine's thoughts on friendship say to you?
2. Is Christian friendship different?
3. How important is it to share and gather community if true friendship is to flourish?
4. Truth, honesty, frankness: what are the demands of genuine friendships?
5. These thoughts on friendship were written by men, might a woman's view be different?

FROM ANOTHER TRADITION

Gibran's reflection contains many echoes of Augustine

And a youth said, Speak to us of Friendship.
And he answered, saying:
Your friend is your needs answered.
He is your field which you sow with love and reap with thanksgiving.
And he is your board and your fireside.
For you come to him with your hunger, and you seek him for peace.

When your friend speaks his mind you fear not the "nay" in your own mind, nor do you withhold the "ay."
And when he is silent your heart ceases not to listen to his heart;
For without words, in friendship, all thoughts, all desires, all expectations are born and shared, with a joy that is unclaimed.
When you part from your friend, you grieve not;
For that which you love most in him may be clearer in his absence, as the mountain climber is clearer from the plain.
And let there be no purpose in friendship save the deepening of the spirit.
For love that seeks aught but the disclosure of its own mystery is not love but a net cast forth: and only the unprofitable is caught.

And let your best be for your friend.
If he must know the ebb of your tide, let him know its flood also.
For what is your friend that you should seek him with hours to kill?
Seek him always with hours to live.
For it is his to fill your need, but not your emptiness.
And in the sweetness of friendship let there be laughter, and sharing of pleasures.
For in the dew of little things the heart finds its morning and is refreshed.

The Prophet. Kahlil Gibran

A FINAL THOUGHT

Friendship must not be circumscribed by narrow limits. It embraces all those to whom affection and love are due, even though it goes out more readily to some and turns more hesitantly towards others. Friendship even extends to our enemies, for whom we are also obliged to pray. Therefore, there is no one in the human race to whom love is not owed, if not by reason of mutual affection, at least because we share a common human nature. On the other hand, it is only right that those especially delight us, by whom we are mutually loved in a holy and chaste way. *Letter 130*

Compiled by Nigel Bavidge