

A stained glass illustration depicting a religious scene. On the left, Jesus is seated, wearing a white robe with a red sash and a green stole, with a red and gold halo. He is gesturing with his right hand. In the center, a woman in a red tunic and green skirt, with a white shawl and a blue and gold halo, stands holding a wooden basket and a stack of white plates. On the right, another woman in a blue tunic and purple skirt, with a white shawl and a blue and gold halo, is seated. The background features architectural elements like columns and arches. A large red and gold cross is visible on the left side.

HERALDS OF THE GOSPEL

Nº 225 - July 2026

Be Friends of God



It is Through Obedience That One Gives All

I must reject any and all reasoning that oppresses me, disturbs me, prevents me from uniting with Our Lord. For several months He has been asking the same thing of me: gentleness towards Him and myself, trust, openness, joy. Through excessive good resolutions, I have been unfaithful to Our Lord on this point.

To obey blindly, with heart and will. To obey the word of guidance all the more, the less I understand it. This is difficult, especially when it seems to me that I should do exactly the opposite.

But this is the path entirely open before me. Therefore, I must not obstinately insist on going through a closed window. It is through this obedience that I will give everything to Our Lord, that I will renounce myself entirely, abandoning

my riches without reservation: that of my will and my own criteria.

And if I want to be generous in this struggle, I will not limit myself to rejecting what oppresses me, holds me back, disturbs me; I will go in search of that which ennobles and gladdens me. Of two thoughts that occur to me, I will choose the one that comforts me.

Not to argue; to believe firmly, without doubting. To obey completely. “Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it,” said Our Lord (Mt 16:25). To give one’s life, one’s soul, is to give entirely to Our Lord what He asks through obedience.

UNE ÉPOPÉE DE VAILLANCE.

La Servante de Dieu Sœur Eugénie Joubert.

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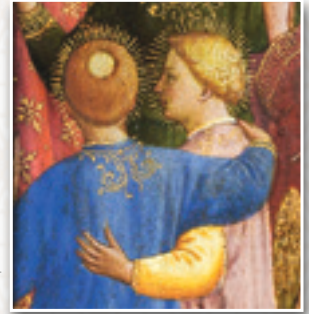
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12 The secret for a sincere and lasting friendship



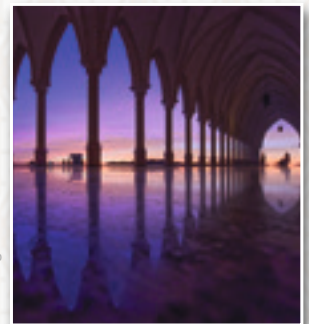
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Send your questions to Fr. Ricardo, by email:
ourreadersask@heralds.org



✠ Fr. Ricardo José Basso, EP

What is the true meaning of Acts 17:24?

Waldir Ramiro – Via email

The verse from the Acts of the Apostles that raises doubts about its interpretation is the following: “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of Heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man.”

First, it is necessary to understand the context of the passage in question. St. Paul was in the Areopagus of Athens. As an excellent evangelist, he could not, at the beginning of his speech, denounce the errors of the Greeks; it was necessary, first of all, to win their hearts.

St. Bede (cf. *Super Acta Apostolorum expositio*, c.XVII) comments that the Apostle to the Gentiles acted gradually: first, he explained that only God is the Creator of the world; then, he openly combated the belief in idolatry; finally, he taught that God, in whose image and likeness man was made, should not be measured by the value of metals.

Despite Paul’s efforts, most of the Athenians rejected his message; only “some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them” (Acts 17:34). Thus, the seed of the Gospel was planted.

In this case, the Apostle echoes the words of King Solomon on the day of the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem: “Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain Thee; how much less this house which I have built!” (1 Kgs 8:27).

Thomas Aquinas, with unparalleled logic and clarity, explains that external worship of God is indeed necessary. Since men are endowed with bodies, their worship also

needs to be provided with physical matter; therefore, they do it in a concrete place, that is, in the temple. In this way, they pay greater reverence to Jesus Christ, both in His divinity and in His humanity. Moreover, in sacred precincts, prayers become more worthy of being heard. For Aquinas, the existence of special times, places, sacred vessels, and ministers for divine worship is also necessary, so as to better demonstrate reverence for God (cf. *Summa Theologiae*. I-II, q.102, a.4).

It is worth remembering that when the Child Jesus was twelve years old and had been lost, Mary and Joseph anxiously searched for Him until “after three days they found Him in the Temple” (Lk 2:46). At the beginning of His public life, Our Lord warned: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn 2:19), referring to “the temple of His Body” (Jn 2:21). St. Luke, in turn, describes that shortly before submitting to the redemptive Passion, “every day He was teaching in the Temple, but at night He went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet. And early in the morning all the people came to Him in the Temple to hear Him” (Lk 21:37-38). By an unfathomable mystery, the very “Temple of God” – Christ – wished to manifest Himself in a special way in the material temple.

In a sublime way, it is also fitting to affirm that the Mother of God was also a temple for the Child Jesus. She conceived Him by the work of the Holy Spirit and contained within herself the very One whom the heavens cannot contain... ✠



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WHERE TO FIND TRUE FRIENDSHIP?

All people, as social beings, want to have friends. There are childhood friends, work friends, those who share the same interests, but there are also occasional and false friends... The contemporary revolution has even conjured up “virtual” friends, forging depersonalized relationships between “influencers” and the mass of “followers.” But are these latter true friends?

The answer is no, for several reasons.

First of all, friendship, in the classical and Christian conception, requires companionship and physical proximity – which is not the case here. Nor can an authentic friendship extend to multiple individuals, because love, although universal in its benevolence, is exclusive in its intimacy. Cybernetic relationships also prove to be ephemeral, which contradicts the essence of friendship: its perpetuity. In fact, a friendship that perishes never even began...

Even far from digital environments, it is difficult to find friendships free from selfish sentimentalism, worldly familiarity or dilettante frivolities. In reality, because genuine friendship needs to be virtuous, and the virtuous are few, true friendships are also scarce as a consequence.

Authentic friendships are founded on God Himself, for He is friendship – *Deus amicitia est*, in the expression of St. Aelred of Rievaulx – Love itself in essence, in which we are given to participate (cf. 1 Jn 4:16). The Father loved us from the beginning and, as supreme proof, sent us His Son, whose charity was consummated on Calvary (cf. Jn 15:13). Moreover, Jesus must always be the “third” in every Christian bond, for He guaranteed His presence when at least two are gathered in His name (cf. Mt 18:20).

Friendship, however, demands reciprocity. How can we repay the immensity of the Creator’s goodness?

Our Lord offers us the key: “You are my friends if you do what I command you” (Jn 15:14). It is, therefore, a question of fulfilling the commandment of love, practised not by mere human effort, but by grace, participation in divine life itself. Paradoxically, we can only love God with that same love with which He loves us.

At the Last Supper, the Divine Master elevates the Apostles from the condition of “servants” to the dignity of “friends.” In the Thomistic interpretation, this means that they are no longer under the shackles of the old legalism, but breathe the freedom of the children of God through grace. And as a seal of this intimacy, Christ confides: “all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (Jn 15:15).

Our friendship with God is not limited to the mere observance of the law and remaining in a state of grace. It also implies the soul’s incessant and habitual search to enter into the intimate life of the Son, in which the Father’s secrets are revealed. As St. Thomas Aquinas teaches, it is natural for friends to confide the secrets of their hearts to one another; however, “since friends have one heart and one soul, it does not seem necessary to express in words what one reveals to one’s friend” (*In Ioannem*, ch.XV, lect.3, n.2016). In short, friends communicate more through the heart than through words.

Ultimately, the mystical life, essentially hidden and mysterious, is the supreme friendship with God. Our souls, hidden in Him (cf. Col 3:3), are progressively deified and become participants in the most amicable Trinitarian interrelationship, by listening to the Father’s secrets through the Word in full union with the Spirit of Love. This is true friendship, in which all others participate. ✠



Our Lord with
St. Martha
and St. Mary
Magdalene -
Church of Saint-
Pierre-aux-Liens,
Cornas (France)

Photo: FredSeiller (CC by-sa
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He Wishes to Be Our Friend!

Friendship: a word little understood in our days, but how real it is to express the intimate union that God desires to establish with us.

A COMMUNION OF THINKING AND WILLING

What is friendship? *Idem velle, idem nolle* – wanting the same things, rejecting the same things: this was how it was expressed in antiquity. Friendship is a communion of thinking and willing.

The Lord says the same thing to us most insistently: “I know my own and my own know Me.” The Shepherd calls His own by name. He knows me by name. I am not just some nameless being in the infinity of the universe. He knows me personally.

Do I know Him? The friendship that He bestows upon me can only mean that I too try to know Him better; that in the Scriptures, in the Sacraments, in prayer, in the communion of saints, in the people who come to me, sent by Him, I try to come to know the Lord Himself more and more.

Friendship is not just about knowing someone; it is above all a communion of the will. It means that my will grows into ever greater conformity with His will. For His will is not something external and foreign to me, something to which I more or less willingly submit or else refuse to submit. No, in friendship, my will grows together with His will, and His will becomes mine.

BENEDICT XVI.
Homily, 29/6/2011

“YES” TO THE FRIEND, “NO” TO WHAT IS CONTRARY TO THE FRIENDSHIP

A gift of friendship implies a “yes” to the friend and a “no” to all that is incompatible with this friendship, to all that is incompatible with the life of God’s family, with true life in Christ. [...] We know these things well but perhaps, precisely because we have heard them too often, the words may not mean much to us. If this is the case, we must think a little more deeply about the content of these “noes”. What are we saying “no” to? This is the only way to understand what we want to say “yes” to.

BENEDICT XVI.
Homily, 8/1/2006

FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD IS OUR SALVATION

Jesus Christ radically transforms man’s relationship with God, which is henceforth a relationship of friendship. Therefore, the only condition of the new covenant is love. St. Augustine, commenting on this passage of the Fourth Gospel, insists on the perspective of grace, which alone can make us friends of God in His Son. Indeed, an ancient motto stated: “*Amicitia aut pares invenit, aut facit*”, “friendship is born between equals, or makes them so”. We are not equal to God, but God Himself makes us similar to Him in His Son. [...]

BENEDICT XVI.
Speech, 10/4/2006

Our experience tells us that friendships can come to an end through a dramatic gesture of rupture, or because of a series of daily acts of neglect that erode the relationship until it is lost.

If Jesus calls us to be friends, let us not leave this call unheeded. Let us welcome it, let us take care of this relationship, and we will discover that friendship with God is our salvation.

LEO XIV.
General Audience, 14/1/2026

BASIS FOR SINCERE FRIENDSHIP WITH OTHERS

The personal encounter with the divine Teacher who calls you friends can be the beginning of an extraordinary adventure: that of becoming apostles among your peers. [...] Then you will see how friendship with Him will lead you to open yourselves to others, whom you consider as brothers or sisters, maintaining with each one a relationship of sincere friendship. In fact, Jesus Christ is truly “the incarnate love of God” (*Deus Caritas Est*, n. 12), and in Him alone can we find the strength to offer our brothers and sisters human affection and supernatural love in a spirit of service, expressed above all in understanding.



**THE POWER
TO TRIUMPH
OVER
DISCOURAGEMENT**

He who has chosen to belong completely to Christ will find, above all, in intimacy with Him and in His grace, the power of spirit necessary to banish sadness and regret and to triumph over discouragement. [...] And if hostility, lack of confidence and the indifference of his fellow men make his solitude quite painful, he will thus be able to share, with dramatic clarity, the very experience of Christ, as an apostle who must not be “greater than He who sent him,” as a friend admitted to the most painful and most glorious secret of his divine Friend.

ST. PAUL VI.
Sacerdotalis cælibatus,
24/6/1967

INCENTIVE FOR PERFECTION

Francis of Assisi was to Clare not only a teacher whose teachings she was to follow but also a brotherly friend. The friendship between these two Saints is a very beautiful and important aspect. Indeed, when two pure souls on fire with the same love for God meet, they find in their friendship with each other a powerful incentive to advance on the path of perfection.

Friendship is one of the noblest and loftiest human sentiments which divine Grace purifies and transfigures. Like St. Francis and St. Clare, other Saints too experienced profound friendship on the journey towards Christian perfection. Examples are St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane Frances de Chantal.

BENEDICT XVI.
General Audience, 15/9/2010



Friendship demands a “yes” to the friend and a “no” to all that is incompatible with this friendship, to all that is not consonant with Christ

Jesus with His friends Lazarus, Martha and Mary -
Church of St. Mary Magdalene, Angers (France)

**FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD
AND ALL BELONGING TO HIM**

He [Thomas Aquinas] was assisted in the composition of his writings by several secretaries, including his confere, Reginald of Piperno, who followed him faithfully and to whom he was bound by a sincere brotherly friendship marked by great confidence and trust. This is a characteristic of Saints: they cultivate friendship because it is one of the noblest manifestations of the human heart and has something divine about it, just as Thomas himself explained in some of the *quaestiones* of his *Summa Theologiae*. He writes in it: “it is evident that charity is the friendship of man for God” and for “all belonging to Him” (II-II, q.23, a.1).

BENEDICT XVI.
General Audience, 2/6/2010

**A UNION THAT
BLOSSOMS**

We shall be able to do very little in the work for the whole Church, which is my and your daily concern, if we have not acquired this close intimacy with the Lord Jesus: if we are not truly with Him and, like Him, consecrated in the truth; if we do not keep His word within us, seeking to discover its hidden riches every day; if God’s very love for His Christ is not deeply rooted in us.

The external unity for which we pray will be the sprouting, the blossoming of that intimate union with Christ, which all the faithful, without distinction, must possess.

ST. JOHN PAUL II.
Speech, 23/1/1981

**MAY HIS FRIENDSHIP
SANCTIFY US**

Insofar as we allow Him [Jesus] to touch us, insofar as the encounter becomes friendship and love, we ourselves, on the basis of His purity, become pure people and then people who love with His love, people who introduce others to His purity and His love.

Augustine summed all this up in a beautiful saying: *Da quod iubes et iube quod vis* – grant what you command, and command what you will.

Let us now bring this request before the Lord and pray to Him: yes, purify us in the truth. May You be the Truth that makes us pure. Obtain that through friendship with You we may become free and thus truly children of God. Make us capable of sitting at your table and spreading in this world the light of your purity and goodness. Amen.

BENEDICT XVI.
Homily, 30/8/2009



July 5 – 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

(Zec 9:9-10; Ps 144; Rom 8:9, 11-13; Mt 11:25-30)

The Virtue of the Great



✠ Fr. Joshua Alexander Sequeira, EP

Grandeur and humility formed an admirable alliance in Jesus Christ. He is the unsurpassed model – as He is in everything – of both virtues

The first reading for this Sunday sounds familiar to every Catholic ear, for it appears on the commemoration of the Saviour’s entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday: “See, your king shall come to you; a just saviour is he, meek, and riding on an ass” (Zec 9:9). Few, however, know the continuation of Zechariah’s prophecy, as he sings of the greatness of the Messiah-King: “His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth” (9:10).

How can the humility of a donkey be reconciled with the greatness of divine power? This is the core of today’s Liturgy.

Egalitarian neopaganism systematically preaches a double lie: it insults grandeur by labelling it as oppressive to the little ones, while it debases humility with a pusillanimous, foolish, and miserabilist caricature.

There was no lack of those who, inculcated with revolutionary prejudices, defamed the Old Testament as “harsh” and “rough,” contrasting it with the “sweetness” of a New Testament that was devoid of all grandeur – as if the God of Sinai were different from the God of Calvary...

The reality, however, reveals itself to be quite different. Grandeur and humility formed an admirable alliance in the God-Man. Jesus Christ is – as in everything! – the unsurpassed model of both virtues. The Lion of Judah is the Lamb of God.

We see Him newborn in the manger, in the stillness of the night broken only by the song of myriads

of Angels from the celestial court and the lowing of animals; we see Him crucified between thieves, shedding the last drops of His redeeming Blood while the sun darkens and the earth trembles; and, on the same Palm Sunday, mounted on a donkey amidst the acclamations of the multitude, as the King of kings who silences the objection of the Pharisees: “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out” (Lk 19:40).

Jesus’ appeal echoes, sonorous and gentle, to the “weary” of all ages: “Come to Me [...], and I will give you rest. [...] learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart” (Mt 11:28-29).

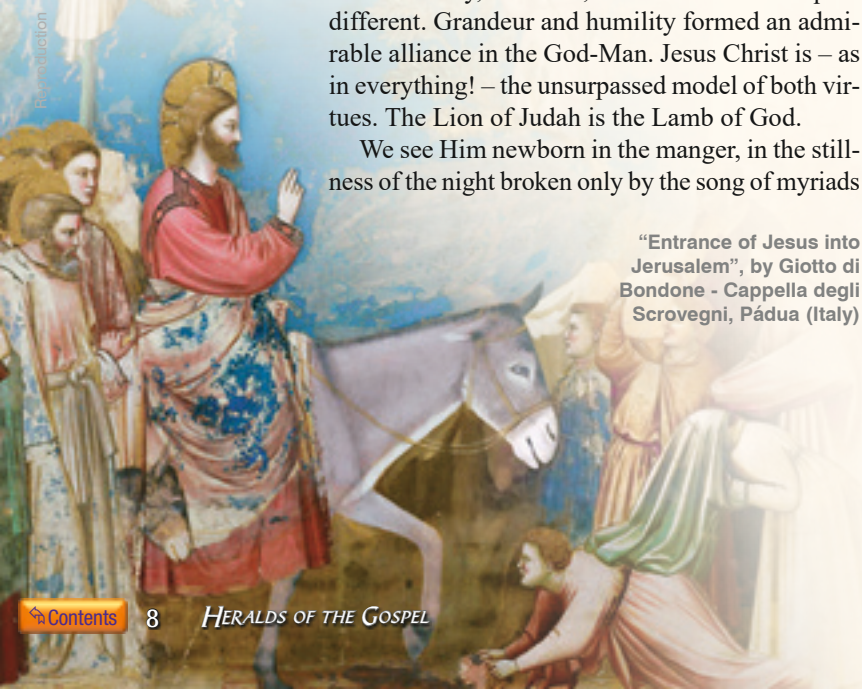
The humble person resignedly acknowledges the truth about himself: he attributes his qualities to divine liberality and his defects to his sinful nature. He is not disheartened by the recognition of his miseries. Truthful and unassuming, he rejoices in the superiorities of others.

Meek in imitation of Christ, the true “little ones” (Mt 11:25b) burn with enthusiasm for the Creator. They ask nothing for themselves, but everything for God, as the psalmist exhorts today. He will spurn those who “live according to the flesh” (Rom 8:13), but will be the protector of those who live according to the spirit, remaining defiant, without bowing down in fear or servility, before the “wise and the learned” (Mt 11:25a) of the earth.

He who bears the gentle yoke of humility quickly becomes magnanimous! Yes, virtues are always sisters: genuine grandeur comes only from humility, and only those who seek magnanimity are humble – those who strive to “undertake great, splendid, and honourable works in every kind of virtue.”¹

Let us pray to the Blessed Virgin that She may teach us to sing the *Magnificat* with her, glorifying the power of God both in scattering the proud and exalting the humble! ✠

“Entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem”, by Giotto di Bondone - Cappella degli Scrovegni, Pádua (Italy)



¹ ROYO MARÍN, OP, Antonio. *Teología de la perfección cristiana*. 6.ed. Madrid: BAC, 1988, p.590.

The Magnificent Hierarchy of Creation



✠ Fr. Rodrigo Alonso Solera, EP

We live in a society steeped in egalitarian principles. To a greater or lesser degree, we are influenced by a profound tendency to reject, or at least resent, the least authority or superiority in others.¹ However, such a stance opposes evangelical doctrine, as we can see in this Sunday's parable.

The symbolic narrative begins with the figure of the sower, without whose action neither the seed could germinate nor the fertile land produce fruit. Christian tradition recognizes in him the image of Christ, sowing His grace and His word in souls. However, this allegory also evokes all those invested with a mission of authority, teaching, or example.

In opposition to egalitarian ideologies, the true superior does not exist to oppress subordinates, but to help them, protect them, spur them on in the practice of good, and guide them to perfection. Thus God ordained the principles of hierarchy and mediation in the universe: "The King and Lord of Heaven instituted this law from all eternity: that the gifts of His Providence should reach the lower realities through intermediaries."²

Next, the Divine Master presents four radically unequal terrains in terms of fertility: the edge of the road symbolizes hardened hearts; the stony ground, the superficial and inconstant; the thorny soil, those choked by unruly passions; and, finally, the good soil evokes souls docile to divine action.

Only the seeds sown in the fertile soil produced fruit, and each in a different degree: some seeds yielded a hundredfold; others, sixty; still others, thirty.

This is further proof of the wrongness of egalitarianism: since a cause cannot produce effects beyond its own measure, equalizing the land would require degrading the best and reducing it to unproductive conditions, and standardizing the seeds would amount to diminishing the fertility of the most fruitful ones. Similarly, among men there are legitimate differences in gifts, abilities, and influences. Each one can, in varying degrees, receive from others and exert upon them a beneficial influ-

ence. Absolute uniformity does not exist; an egalitarian civilization would impoverish the harmony of creation and only build ruins.

One might object: but is there not injustice in inequality? It is the Angelic Doctor who answers: "It was fitting that the diversity of things should have been instituted with a certain order, so that some might be better than others. [...] In order that the divine likeness of created things might be more perfect, it was necessary that some should be constituted better than others, and that some should act upon others, leading them to perfection."³

All creation, therefore, is arranged in different degrees, and so too should social organization be: a harmonious hierarchy, established upon the foundations of charity.

Finally, the diversity of the fruits yielded invites us to a serious examination of conscience: what kind of seed are we in the fulfilment of our duties of state and those of piety? Do we produce works of a hundredfold, or only of sixty or thirty? Do we seek to offer God the best, according to our concrete possibilities? Or are we content with mediocre works, dedicating to the Creator only part of our love and effort?

Let us ask Our Lord, the Divine Sower, to transform our hearts into fertile, humble, pure soil, admiring the qualities of others. In this way, we will produce generous fruits, a hundredfold. ✠

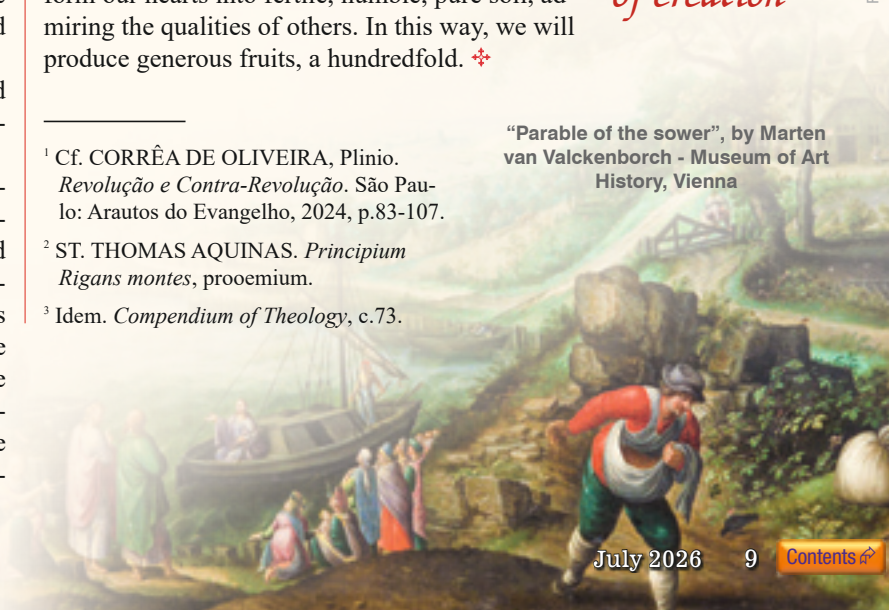
Like the fields and seeds, among men there are legitimate differences in gifts, abilities, and influences. An egalitarian civilization would impoverish the harmony of creation

¹ Cf. CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plínio. *Revolução e Contra-Revolução*. São Paulo: Arautos do Evangelho, 2024, p.83-107.

² ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Principium Rigans montes*, prooemium.

³ Idem. *Compendium of Theology*, c.73.

"Parable of the sower", by Marten van Valckenborch - Museum of Art History, Vienna



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Divine Patience, Absolute Justice



✠ Fr. Manuel Rodríguez, EP

How easy it is to correct with excessive rigour, especially when it comes to someone else's fault that bothers us! In the parable of the wheat and the tares, however, Our Lord Jesus Christ shows us a different path. True authority is not exercised only through power, but is nurtured by charity and patience, as the Book of Wisdom reminds us: "For your might is the source of justice; your mastery over all things makes you lenient to all" (Wis 12:16).

In the Gospel account, the enemy – the devil – seeks to ruin the harvest by sowing tares. In view of this adversity, God does not react rashly: He exercises longsuffering, hoping for a conversion. First, He considers: "if you pull up the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them"; then, He waits with clemency: "Let them grow together until harvest." If the weeds persist in their scheme and do not repent, then they will be pulled up and tied "in bundles for burning" (Mt 13:29-30).

The teaching contained in this divine parable bore fruit in the golden ages of Christendom, serving as a paradigm for holy kings such as St. Louis of France and St. Ferdinand of Castile. These monarchs understood that authority must be exercised in accordance with divine precepts: through their goodness, they protected and encouraged what was good with paternal solicitude; through deterrence, they exemplarily repressed the evil that threatened the wheat of their kingdoms.

It might be argued that, by letting both grow together, there is a risk that the more aggressive tares

will choke the wheat. Nevertheless, the owner of the field, with divine prudence, awaits the development of both plants. As the months go by, the difference becomes evident: the ears of wheat, laden with grains, bow humbly; the tares stand straight with arrogance, but without bearing fruit. The true wheat does not let itself be overcome by the tares; it faces them patiently until the end.

This is the moment to proceed, energetically and unhesitatingly, with the definitive separation.

Applying this to the context of the Church, many pass for good Catholics, while inwardly they operate like weeds in the Lord's garden... In fact, at harvest time the abyss that separates one from the other becomes evident: the wheat bears the mark of charity; the tares serve only themselves; they are sterile. Therefore, they deserve the fire.

The final judgement of the owner of the field is, therefore, one of absolute justice: to separate those who lived in a spirit of service, in the patience of good works from those who, driven by a spirit of pride, have spent their lives seeking to stand out above the wheatfields.

How long will it be until the final harvest? We do not know. In any case, even if at times we feel suffocated by the tares and weakened by adversity, let us be certain that "The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness" (Rom 8:26).

Through Him we remain firm ears of wheat, under the protection of the Virgin Mary. Thus, we will never be consumed by the infernal fire destined for those who embraced the tares of the devil. ✠

True wheat does not allow itself to be overcome by the tares; it faces them patiently until the end. This is the moment to proceed with the definitive separation



John Salmon (CC by-sa 2.0)

Parable of the wheat and the tares - St. John the Baptist Church, Aylmerton (United Kingdom)

A Transformative Treasure



✠ Fr. Timothy Joseph Ring, EP

The parables taught by Our Lord constitute an invitation to the Kingdom of Heaven – an expression used more than thirty times by St. Matthew. In today’s Gospel, this Kingdom is compared to an accessible, splendid treasure, but one full of challenges: its conquest requires a transformation of mentality.

In the first parable, a certain man discovers a treasure hidden in a field. Finding it unexpectedly is a symbol of *gratia gratis data* – grace freely given. It demonstrates that God wants to grant the best, abundantly, without any merit. This abundant and valuable treasure refers to the richness of wisdom, the same that Solomon requested and was granted to govern the chosen people (cf. 1 Kgs 3:5-12). In short, it symbolizes the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in which are contained “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3).

The second parable expresses the striving of the merchant who seeks precious pearls. This treasure, considered particularly beautiful, should never be thrown to the swine (cf. Mt 7:6) – that is, it must be carefully protected. Now, according to St. Thomas,¹ beauty comprises three elements: integrity or perfection, proportion or harmony, and clarity. These attributes are fully found in Christ, “the fairest of the sons of men” (Ps 44:3), whose radiance Mary, “all fair” (Sg 4:7), shares in.

Finally, the last parable, that of the net cast into the sea, introduces a distinct note: while the previous ones evoke the joy of finding the Kingdom, this last one underlines the inexorable judgement between the good and the bad fish: some are placed in

the baskets; others, thrown away. The righteous will be saved; as for the wicked, the Angels will “throw them into the fiery furnace” (Mt 13:50). Therefore, we need to trust, for “all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose [...]. And those He predestined He also called; and those He called He also justified; and those He justified He also glorified” (Rom 8:28, 30).

The first Apostles were fishers of men who, casting the nets of true saving doctrine into a “sea” that was sometimes calm and sometimes turbulent, offered their contemporaries

“all the words of this Life” (Acts 5:20), already here on earth, for “our commonwealth is in Heaven” (Phil 3:20).

God freely bestows upon us the grace to love Him and abundant encouragement to seek Him. He grants us strength to renounce bad habits and detach ourselves from evil inclinations. This constitutes a true treasure which, kept in our heart, transforms our existence and, amidst the vicissitudes of this life, allows us to anticipate

the Kingdom of Heaven.

The greatest treasure that Christ left us was His Mother. Therefore, let us raise our hearts to her with supplication: O Most Holy Mary, Queen of Heaven, perfect Disciple, who kept in your Heart all the wonders worked by your Divine Son, intercede for us and transform our hearts, so that we may already live on this earth the reality of the Kingdom of Heaven! ✠



“Parable of the hidden treasure”,
by Rembrandt - Fine Arts Museum,
Budapest

Jesus offers us a treasure that, kept in our hearts, transforms our existence, in anticipation of the joys of the Kingdom of Heaven

¹ Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Theologiae*. I, q.39, a.8.

True Friendship

Perfect fellowship presupposes having God at the centre; then all inclinations are well-ordered; the defects, bad temper and bitterness of others are forgotten; wounds go unheeded in the pursuit of admiring the virtue and the divine design regarding each individual.

✠ Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, EP

When we look up at the sky and see the stars, they look like an immense collection of tiny lights, very similar to each other. However, if we observe them through a telescope, we realize the great variety that exists among the stars, as St. Paul affirms: “*Stella enim a stella differt in claritate* – “for star differs from star in glory” (1 Cor 15:41).

The same is true of people: although all belong to the human race, are physically constituted of head, trunk, and limbs, and have a soul with its powers, the diversity that exists among them is great! Each human being constitutes a small “universe.”

Consequently, a curious phenomenon occurs: the closer an individual – or a human group – comes to a high degree of perfection, the more differences we find among them.

There are people who have little expressiveness, are sparing in gestures and attitudes, and, above all, possess only one type of affection. In an artist’s brush or pencil, they would be depicted in just a few strokes, given their simplicity.

At the opposite extreme, someone who is very rich in personality, full of gifts and characteristics, will appear polymorphic, profuse in facial expressions, in ways of being and acting; and, in their affectivity, will be able to establish completely different forms of friendship.

Imbalances in human relationships

Each human being, because of the instinct of sociability, is constantly searching for someone who understands them deeply, loves them completely, and is totally loyal to them. God placed this desire in the soul to facilitate mutual understanding between people, reciprocal support, and the pursuit of the common good by all.

However, most of the time, a person does not find what they expected and begins to experience disappointments and violent clashes! Indeed, after original sin, man’s inclinations became unbalanced, and, whether hereditary or due to bad habits acquired throughout his life, he has the tendency to establish himself as the centre of attention at all costs, considering himself superior

to others, if he does not practise virtue aided by grace.

This is why he establishes misguided and distorted friendships, based on self-love, pragmatism, and personal advantages. Hence arise envy, criticism, mistreatment, fights, dissension... There also arise misunderstandings between those who marry for financial gain or seeking projection in their social sphere, or even for romantic and superficial reasons, attracted merely by physical beauty.

Sentimental affection is that which unites two people through merely human affinities, and one contemplates the other in the illusion that the centre of friendship exists in them, forgetting to admire supernatural qualities. This alliance between two who walk towards evil and appreciate each other because of sin is never stable: the next step will consist of wanting the spouse’s esteem in order to feel adored, imagining that they will reciprocate in kind. After some time, the result will always be betrayal and enmity, and both will become unfaithful to the sacred oath of matrimony, made

before the minister, before the altar, and which could not have been broken until death.

How many disappointments in the lives of those who trust in friendships forged outside of God's grace! Self-love and sentimentality cause all the disasters and deviations that have existed in human relationships throughout history!

Contemporary society is going through an "earthquake" whose cause lies in relationships founded on selfishness and impurity. Dealings worthy of hell have taken over the face of the earth, and this modern world is falling apart because true friendship has disappeared and people wish the worst for each other, that is, condemnation. Gone are the altruistic, idealistic, supernatural relationships; and with them, holy friendships.

What constitutes true friendship?

What does it mean to be a friend?

The word *friend* has been greatly besmirched throughout the centuries and still is today; but it has a profound meaning, as considered in Theology to designate the presence of the Holy Trinity in the human soul through Baptism: God relates to us as Father and Friend.

It could be said that the Father loved us madly, to the point of giving His Son as an expiatory Victim to buy us at the infinite price of His Most Precious Blood! "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13). If even one man had committed a single sin, the Word would have become incarnate and suffered the entire Passion to save this friend and deliver him from slavery to the devil, giving him freedom within His ranks.

Now, there must be reciprocity in this love. If Our Lord gave His life

for us, what should we give? Love is proven by deeds. We are invited to friendship with Jesus through the fulfilment of the Commandments and love for one another, as He said: "You are my friends if you do what I com-



True friendship: it is not found in sentimentality, nor is it just a simple benevolence. Rather, it is to enjoy the same trust, to love with abnegation and selflessness, with angelic purity, respect and elevation of spirit

David and Jonathan - St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh (Scotland); on the previous page, detail of "The Final Judgement", by Fra Angelico - Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

mand you. [...] This I command you, to love one another" (Jn 15:14, 17). The measure of whether we enjoy full friendship with the Lord lies in our commitment to favouring others out of love for Him.

We must love God above all things, with a radical and absolute love, even more than ourselves. The inclination to love the Creator more than oneself is inherent in human nature – as well as in angelic nature –; and not even original sin managed to destroy this tendency completely. Therefore, selfishness is a horrendous sin, for it rises up against this instinct and crushes it, to replace it with exaggerated self-love.

We cannot fail to love one another, but it is necessary to do so for the love of God, aspiring to fulfil our mission to give Him all the glory He deserves. And so it is with our neighbour: we must love them as ourselves, that is, desire the total fulfilment of their vocation so that God may be glorified.

This is the standard of true friendship: it is not found in romanticism and sentimentality; nor is it just a simple benevolence. Friendship goes far beyond that, it is on a higher plane; it is closeness, it is enjoying the same trust, it is loving unpretentiously, with abnegation and selflessness, with angelic purity, respect and elevation of spirit.

Perfect fellowship presupposes having God at the centre; then all inclinations are well-ordered; the defects, bad temper and bitterness of others are forgotten; wounds go unheeded in the pursuit of admiring the virtue and the divine design regarding each individual.

Wishing the other well is an essential element for friendship to be pure, authentic and full of consolations. It does not mean wishing for a tourist vacation for your friend, where he stays in excellent

hotels and frequents good restaurants, because that would be a worldly friendship, unless this were with the intention of bringing him closer to Heaven. But the best thing to wish for someone – especially a very close friend, whom

we warmly esteem – is, rather, eternal salvation, in the enjoyment of God’s presence, knowing Him face to face and loving Him as He is.

Therefore, true friendship sometimes involves saying difficult things because, seeing someone in danger or finding a fault in him, one must seek to correct him, with the aim of helping that soul to be entirely in accordance with God; just like the doctor who takes the scalpel and makes an incision to remove an infected abscess, in order to cure the patient.

A good wine, when tasted, leaves its flavour lingering on the palate, where it refines and intensifies, to the point of causing fond longings... Similarly, a true friend is one whose company makes us forget everything else, so captivated are we by their presence, feeling their willingness to endure whatever is necessary for us, as well as their commitment, affection, and care in achieving our utmost sanctification.

Dr. Plinio: the best friend

Anyone fortunate enough to have known a man like Dr. Plinio could attest to the incalculable intricacy and richness of these principles regarding friendship practised by him. While we have highlighted aspects of his vocation, his paternal nature, his prophetic vision, or his wisdom on other occasions, it is also fitting to focus on a little-analysed aspect of his personality: the way he made friends.

Dr. Plinio was the best friend of all who approached him. But, since he was just, he established a different kind of friendly relationship with the people around him, adapted to what each one deserved, according to the light placed by the finger of God in every soul. Therefore, although I often saw him worried about the problems and complications his friends presented, I never noticed him downcast or shaken, because he confided that, despite the flaws, the divine plan would somehow be fulfilled.

His affable and affectionate manner was a constant invitation for a person to leave behind their flaws and embrace virtue, with a view to that purpose for which they were called to complete the greatness and beauty of the Creator’s work.

The depth of Dr. Plinio’s friendships was unfathomable. At times with the nurse, at others with the barber – paid for specific services – he showed a courtesy that neither of them would ever find from anyone else, anywhere on earth. He had a fraternal and specific esteem for his relatives, until the end.

As for those to whom he was bound by a supernatural connection, he maintained a lifelong boundless friendship, until death, willing to do everything necessary for them.

Even when his friendship was not reciprocated, he did not break it. With regards to a person who was so bold as to make disproportionate expenditures with Dr. Plinio’s funds, he continued his dealings without any friction, despite the damage suffered. He endured another, a petty and sentimental soul, as not even a mother would, abandoning his own occupations and carving out a space in his scarce time to attend to him.

A lifelong friendship

I was close to Dr. Plinio for forty years, and I can say that our relationship was filled with extraordinary expressions of esteem, consideration, and goodwill. Given the profoundly magnanimous nature of his soul, he possessed a very strong sense of reciprocity, demonstrating his contentment for any benefit received, remaining grateful until the end of his life.

On the other hand, from the moment I met him, I felt completely understood by him and was drawn to this friendship. He showed complete solidarity with me, adapted to my temperament, and liked my way of being. He also perceived that I was one with him, to



A true friend is one whose company makes us forget everything else, feeling their willingness to endure whatever is necessary for us, as well as their commitment, affection, and care in achieving our utmost sanctification

Dr. Plinio and the then Mr. João in Consolation Cemetery, São Paulo, in 1992

the point of doing everything he asked of me.

Such a bond could be defined by what the Germans call *zusammen sein*, literally translated as *being together*, but which encompasses a richer meaning and signifies the gladness of participating in a fellowship where all are united, and in which one intensely experiences a profound union of souls.

How many episodes I could tell from the history of this lifelong friendship! A true friend is proven especially in times of difficulty, and I knew perfectly well that I could turn to him in the most varied circumstances and confide all my secrets to him – both my weaknesses and my successes – placing everything I had in his hands.

During my travels, he was ready to answer my calls for as long as necessary, at any time of day or night, without showing the slightest sign of weariness. In humiliating situations or in cases that I, distressed, did not know how to resolve, he was there, watching over me to support and protect me.

And even if I were to commit the greatest mistake, I was certain that he would forgive me – even beforehand – and be willing to help me, unreservedly associating himself with my situation, as if it were his responsibility, like the priest who absolves all sins in the confessional.

I remember, for example, that I once received a very unpleasant fifteen-page letter in which the sender judged that, according to his criteria, I had not proceeded correctly.

Perplexed, and unsure of what effect a reply from me might cause, I consulted Dr. Plinio, asking him for guidance. After reading the letter, he dictated the reply as if it were me, using my own language and style of writing!

This thoughtfulness was evident even in the smallest things. One day, I got caught in a heavy downpour as I got out of the car, arriving at his apart-



Photos: Magazine Archive

More than a father, Dr. Plinio was a friend with a capital “F” – in a way that was unrivalled, endless, and boundless

Dr. Plinio and Mr. João in 1990

ment for lunch. As I sat down at the table, he noticed the wet sleeve of my jacket; so he asked for a towel to be brought, and told me to move a little closer so that he could dry me off himself, saying:

“My son, if you stay wet, you might catch a cold!”

On another occasion, when I was a law student in 1962, it so happened that, due to a series of commitments that day, I had gone without food from six in the morning until four in the afternoon. As I had no money with me to buy anything, and there was no one else to turn to – for Dr. Plinio was the only other person where I was – I asked him to lend me some money for lunch. He immediately replied:

“Take my wallet and spend whatever you need.”

When I returned to give him back his wallet and thank him, he said:

“My son, it is I who must thank you, because today you have given me the great joy of showing that I am your father!”

However, more than a father, he was a friend with a capital “F” – his was friendship that was boundless, unrivalled, endless, and beyond measure... I always sensed in him an immense commitment to helping me attain the highest gifts and reach the pinnacle of perfection. In my spiritual life, in my perseverance and devotion to Our Lady, and in all that is good about me, he played a fundamental role.

Therein lies the joy, in accordance with the words of Our Lord to the Apostles: “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (Jn 15:11). “Full joy” lies in loving what is superior and giving of oneself to the one who is greater, with a view to total surrender to God. A soul that lives in this perspective possesses true happiness. ✦

Excerpts from oral expositions given between 1999 and 2010

Spiritual friendship

One Heart and One Soul

Steeped in mediocrity and materialism, today’s world needs to recover the meaning of true friendship, rooted in charity, and its value in human society.



✠ Fr. Aumir Antonio Scomparin, EP

Some say that friendship is as old as humanity itself... Indeed, endowed with a sociable nature, human beings have a need to form groups and to interact with one another. This is a natural tendency, immortalized by Cicero as the “instinct of sociability.”¹ However, living in society is only possible through harmony, which presupposes an amicable relationship in which sincere friends support one another

and mutually approve of one another’s thoughts, convictions and conduct.

Without friendship, any human relationship is subject to division, sedition and discord, confirming the maxim that man is a wolf to his fellow man: “*Lupus est homo homini.*”²

This is what we can observe in the early days of humanity, after the Fall, when we encounter hostility and fratricide: Cain was Abel’s brother, but not

his friend, and so he killed him out of envy (cf. Gn 4:8).

Unfortunately, we need not go back so far in time, for today’s world, steeped in selfish interests and dominated by the mediocrity of materialism and hedonism, seems to have lost the true meaning of friendship. The word “friend” is used just as readily in a cold business letter as in a genuine fraternal relationship. In any case, one almost has to search with a magnifying glass to find a true friend.

Never have the wise words of Sacred Scripture been so relevant: “A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter: he that has found one has found a treasure” (Sir 6:14).³

Friendship since Antiquity

It is therefore essential to restore the original meaning of friendship and its value in human relations. Aristotle, the great theorist on the subject, emphasized its importance and absolute necessity in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: “Without friends, no one would wish to live, even if they possessed all other goods.”⁴

Common sense also makes the need for friendship clear, but what does it actually consist of?

Among the Greeks, friendship arose from relationships of benevolence, affection, pleasure or even utility, wheth-



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In our society, steeped in selfish interests and dominated by materialism and hedonism, one almost has to search with a magnifying glass to find a true friend...

“An evening with visiting friends”, by Viggo Johansen - New Pinacotheca, Munich (Germany)

er due to human circumstances or the pursuit of wisdom. Its duration depended on the reason for which it had been formed. But true friendship, the kind that endures and is faithful, was chiefly linked to the idea of virtue. For the Philosopher,⁵ when put to the test, such friendship remains firmly established in a selfless love that unites the virtuous in the pursuit of mutual perfection. And even if there are differences between friends, there will be harmony between them as long as virtue and a common ideal are present.

Among the Latins, the classic definition is attributed to Cicero, in his work *De amicitia*. He states that friendship is “the harmony of all things divine and human, through benevolence and love.”⁶ And he goes a step further, saying that “he who looks upon a friend looks upon a portrait of himself,”⁷ such is the intensity of the bond between them.

The original notion of friendship emerged alongside many conceptual terms, particularly Greek ones, stemming from various understandings of love: from the term *storgē* – *στοργή*, the natural affection within the family, from parents to children and children to parents; through to *érōs* – *ἔρως*, passionate, carnal and romantic love; to *philia* – *φιλία*, the term that most closely approximates friendship, as it conveys an idea of honest love, brotherhood and affection. There is also *agápē* – *ἀγάπη*, used by philosophers to denote a voluntary and altruistic love.

Agape: the foundation of Christian friendship

However, the Greeks had no concept of a love that was entirely self-

less and devoid of selfishness, as the Christian agape came to be. It was in biblical literature that it took on the meaning of a higher form of friendship, a term found in the New Testament “one hundred and seventeen times, of which seventy-five times in St. Paul and twenty-five in St. John.”⁸



The primitive Greek idea of friendship does not carry the notion of a love that is completely altruistic and free of egoism, as in the Christian agape:

“love one another, even as I have loved you”

Our Lord and St. John the Evangelist -
St. Hubert Church, Aubel, (Belgium)

In the Latin translations of the Scriptures, *philia*, which appears in the Gospel of St. John to express the relationship between Our Lord and His disciples – “I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (Jn 15:15) – was translated as *amor*. The verb *agapao* – *ἀγαπάω*, from which the noun *agápē* derives, was translated as *diligere* – a verb that gives rise to the noun *dilectio*. *Agápē* was rendered in Latin as *caritas*.

In the treatise *De caritate* of the *Summa Theologiae*, St. Thomas Aquinas “deals quite precisely with these three terms: *amor*, *dilectio*, *caritas*, to which we must add *amicitia*,”⁹ defining the foundations of Christian friendship. Drawing on ancient insights into friendship, particularly in Aristotle’s *Ethics*, the Angelic Doctor¹⁰ was one of the authors who studied it most extensively, relating it to social life and the virtues, highlighting its most important aspects – especially benevolence, communication and reciprocity – from a Christian perspective: “Nothing inspires love more than knowing that one is loved.”¹¹

This is the attitude of the Christian, who acknowledges that he loves God “because He first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19). And the philosophy of the Gospel is summed up in this precept, the foundation of friendship as Christian agape: “as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:34–35).

The divine model: spiritual friendship

St. Augustine was the first Christian author to develop a theory of friendship, and his influence continued well into the Middle Ages. During this period, Richard of St. Victor – in *De Trinitate*, his principal work – observes that people are born to live in a community of love. Now, for Richard, the fulfilment of existence as a personal being can only exist to the extent that there is *love for another*. There is, therefore, an intrinsic connection between the existence of the person and charity. In this author’s view, divine



love is altruistic and mutual, and thus involves a plurality: the Trinity of Persons. Thus, Trinitarian love achieves its full realization not only through the mutual love between Father and Son, but also through the communication of this love to a third party, that is, the Holy Spirit.

The love among friends, in this Christian perspective, is nothing other than a vestige of the Trinitarian perichoresis, the divine model of Christian agape friendship or charity, since “*Deus caritas est*” (1 Jn 4:8). Charity is, therefore, man’s friendship with God, and man’s friendship with man for love of God. Natural friendship becomes supernatural, “one of the noblest and loftiest human sentiments which divine Grace purifies and transfigures.”¹²

The value and meaning of friendship towards one’s neighbour is no different, when each person is part of the same Mystical Body: “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together” (1 Cor 12:26). This interconnection is so profound that “true friends have one soul,”¹³ as Aristotle once stated, as in the close friendship of the early Christians: “the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32), in Christ.

This is the love He revealed to His friends, the foundation of the communion prevailing among the members of the early Church, the *koinonía* – κοινωνία, which expresses the unity of Christians, grounded in this wholly spiritual friendship. “Friendship is

a communion of thinking and willing. [...] in friendship, my will grows together with His will, and His will becomes mine: this is how I become truly myself.”¹⁴

The example of religious life

This supernatural friendship reached the height of its fulfilment in monastic life. The Augustinian Rule exhorted religious living in community to be “*anima una et cor unum in*

tor Amicitiae – Doctor of Friendship. By Christianizing the Ciceronian idea of friendship, he established the value of human friendship from its origins, with our first parents, to its permanent fulfilment in the beatific vision.

For him, perfect friendship consists in Cicero’s expression – harmony among all who share the same sense of the divine and the human, and the same will, marked by benevolence and charity¹⁶ – for “friendship is a state close

to perfection, which consists in the knowledge and love of God, [so that] man, from being a friend of man, becomes a friend of God.”¹⁷ Aelred applies to agape friendship what St. John, “the friend of Jesus,” says about charity: “Is God friendship? [...] What he goes on to say about charity, I have no hesitation in applying to friendship: *Whoever remains in friendship remains in God and God in him* (cf. 1 Jn 4:16).”¹⁸

The virtues that spring from friendship, such as joy and kindness, “are born of Christ, developed through Christ and perfected in Christ.”¹⁹ He goes on to remark that “through the love shared between friends, each becomes a ‘second self’ to the other. This is similar to Aristotle’s idea when he says that a friend is to us like a mirror.”²⁰

It is also possible to apply these concepts to consecrated life. In a religious family, there is also the bond with the founder, the source of love among his spiritual children. He is a mirror of God for his disciples.

Indeed, many religious institutes began with a gathering of friends and



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The love among friends, in the Christian perspective, is nothing other than a vestige of the Trinitarian perichoresis, the divine model of authentic friendship

St. Paul takes leave of the Ephesians - Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls

Deum,”¹⁵ to have a unity of friendship in charity.

Centuries later, Aelred, abbot of the Cistercian monastery of Rievaulx and author of the work *De spirituali amicitia*, deserves special mention; this work earned him the epithet *Doc-*

disciples around a master, whom they sought out because of his reputation for holiness. Among many others, we might recall St. Anthony, St. Jerome, St. Benedict, St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi, and St. Dominic of Gusman. Others formed groups of friends who gathered to discuss their ideals, such as St. Augustine, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Philip Neri and St. John Bosco. All led a simple lifestyle, initially without rules or constitutions, for above all they lived under the law of friendship.

A model for society

No religious institution would have survived the centuries without this strong bond with its founder, the source of vitality for every order, for the founder embodies the message of his ideal, making him a reference point and a model.²¹ For the religious, being faithful to the founding charism and progressing along the paths of charity – which is equivalent to agapic friendship – means assimilating the spirit of the founder²² and becoming like him, being a “portrait” of him.

All humanity is called to become like the Father, its ultimate end, through charity in human relationships. This,



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In a religious family, there is also the bond with the founder, the source of love among his spiritual children and a mirror of God for his disciples

“St. Benedict receiving St. Maurus and St. Placidus into the Benedictine Order”, by Lorenzo Monaco - National Gallery, London

however, is only possible in the presence of true friendship, for “he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 Jn 4:20). It is therefore necessary to restore authentically Christian friendship, that is, the kind modelled on the agape of the Son, whose love reached its zenith in giving “His life for His friends” (Jn 15:13).

Finally, it is worth mentioning the role of Our Lady. It was through the Blessed Virgin Mary, the friend of the bride and groom at the Wedding at Cana (cf. Jn 2:3–5), that Christ saved that wedding feast. It will also be through her that the Divine Paraclete will renew the face of the earth, by restoring true charity in souls. Only in this way will all be “*cor unum et anima una*” (Acts 4:32). ✠

¹ CICERO, Marcus Tullius. *De re publica*. L.I, c.25, n.39.

² PLAUTUS, Titus Maccius. *Asinaria*. Act.II, c.4.

³ This article is based on the author’s doctoral thesis in philosophy (magna cum laude), awarded by the Pontifical Bolivarian University, Medellín, Colombia (2020), entitled: *Amistad en las órdenes religiosas: su fundamento filosófico y su contribución como ágape, en función del fundador* [Friendship in religious orders: its philosophical foundation and its contribution

as agape, in relation to the founder].

⁴ ARISTOTLE. *Nicomachean Ethics*. L.VIII, c.1.

⁵ Cf. idem. *Eudemian Ethics*. L.VII, c.1-3.

⁶ CICERO, Marcus Tullius. *De amicitia*, n.20.

⁷ Ibid., n.23.

⁸ HENRY, Antonin-Marcel. Introdução a “A caridade”. In: ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Theologiae*. 3.ed. São Paulo: Loyola, 2012, v.V, p.287.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Theologiae*. II-II, q.23, a.1.

¹¹ Idem. *De rationibus fidei*, c.V.

¹² BENEDICT XVI. *General Audience*, 15/9/2010.

¹³ ARISTOTLE. *Eudemian Ethics*. L.VII, c.6.

¹⁴ BENEDICT XVI. *Homily*, 29/6/2011.

¹⁵ From the Latin: “with one heart and one soul in God” (ST. AUGUSTINE. *Præceptum*. Pars I, c.I, n.2.).

¹⁶ Cf. AELRED OF RIEVAULX. *De spirituali amicitia*. L.I, n.13.

¹⁷ Ibid., L.II, n.14.

¹⁸ Ibid., L.I, n.69-70.

¹⁹ Ibid., L.II, n.20.

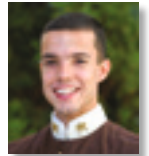
²⁰ WADELL, Paul Joseph. *La primacía del amor. Una introducción a la ética de Tomás de Aquino*. 2.ed. Madrid: Palabra, 2007, p.139.

²¹ Cf. CIARDI, Fabio. *Los fundadores, hombres del espíritu. Para una teología del carisma de fundador*. Madrid: Paulinas, 1983, p.300.

²² Cf. ST. JOHN PAUL II. *Vita consecrata*, n.36.

Tell Me Who Your Friends Are...

Bad friendships are one of the greatest obstacles to our salvation. But how can we spot bad friends? How can we avoid being influenced by them?



↳ Lucas Rezende de Sousa

Let us imagine that God has granted us the possibility of creating. Not just any being, but a human being; not just any human being, but a friend; not only a friend, but the ideal friend. We immediately begin to bring together all kinds of qualities in this person: a gentle manner, patience, intelligence, willpower, the most diverse virtues. We idealize someone who is agreeable, harbours feelings similar to ours and shares in our tastes.

When we are about to create this masterpiece, we hear God telling us that, among all those qualities, our friend can only have one of them. Perplexed, we begin the reverse process,

a painful stripping away of desirable attributes. In the end, what will we choose: patience or willpower, intelligence or affable manner?

The French would call this situation *embarras du choix*, something like “torn between choices.”

The solution, however, becomes very simple if we take into account that a friend is like a travel companion. Even if there were a person capable of embodying all the characteristics of an ideal friend to the point of being almost an angel, we would never choose him to accompany us on a trip if he did not possess one specific quality: having the same destination as us.

Well, on the most momentous journey, that of life towards eternity, it is essential to consider with special seriousness the choice of who will be our travel companions. Otherwise, it may happen that dangerous

friendships, with paths different from our own, lead us to other destinations...

Bad friendships or veiled enmities?

To someone who said “I have no enemies,” we would respond with an ancient thinker: “By chance do you have any friends?”¹ Sometimes, our worst enemies are not as far away as we imagine, so it is also important to ask God to protect us not only from enemies, but also from *bad friends*.

Bad friends: perhaps it would be difficult to find a more mismatched and incoherent combination of words. Can a *friend* be *bad*? Is friendship a profession that can be performed well or poorly? Obviously not. Rather, it forms part of that spectrum of realities so profound that, once defined, take on a different character: virtues.²

Indeed, one does not call injustice “bad justice”, or intemperance “bad temperance”. The implacable “in” with which we prefix these words does not signify distortion, but rather negation: *in-justice* is the absence of justice, just as *in-temperance* is the absence of temperance. So why do we consider as *bad*

Our worst enemies are sometimes not as far away as we imagine, so it is important to ask God to protect us from bad friends

“Tavern scene”, by David Teniers - National Gallery of Art, Washington DC





Francisco Lecaros



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friendship something that, at its core, is *enmity*? Let us remember this: a bad friend always reveals himself to be an enemy of our soul. If we follow him on his path, we may arrive anywhere but the Kingdom of Heaven: through his folly, we will perish with him (cf. Sir 8:15).

Now, how to spot false friends? They are like wolves in sheep's clothing (cf. Mt 7:15)... Many of them camouflage themselves prodigiously well, it is true, but let us look at some symptoms of false friendship: it is the wolf's claws and teeth that pierce through the disguise.

Anaesthetist of conscience

Some consider friendship as the capacity to be an accomplice. According to them, a true friend is one who turns a blind eye to the faults of others. In the case of a sensitive or hurt conscience, we need only to look for him: he has all the "anaesthetics". His kindness and esteem towards are so extreme that he does not dare to cause us the slightest displeasure. In this logic, his attitude can be compared to that of a physician who lets his patient die instead of subjecting him to the bitterness of the medicines that could cure him...

But the reality is different: friendship exists to be a companion to virtues, not vices.³ A true friend is one who consoles during trials, gives sup-

The bad friend, or rather, the disguised enemy, does not need a job: his livelihood is flattery, his salary is his own friend. He is present at happy moments, for companions that are unailing in times of joy are rarely so in sorrow

"The prodigal son spending his money in riotous living", by Franz Christoph Janneck; inset: "The money changers", by Marinus van Reymerswaele - Fine Arts Museum, Nancy (France)

port in spiritual aridity, assists in virtue, and corrects our deviations in a fraternal way. Good advice, wisely given and received with gratitude, even when it has the medicinal taste of reprimand, unites two souls with bonds stronger and more resilient than a diamond.

Culture of others' triumphs

The bad friend, or rather, the disguised enemy, does not need a job: his livelihood is flattery, his salary is his own friend.

However, let us not confuse flattery or adulation with praise and the desire to please. As a matter of justice, good deeds should be praised, and it is not a sin to seek to please those who live with us. However, this cannot be done with the intention of making a profit.⁴

The flatterer is very well illustrated in one of Jean de La Fontaine's famous fables. A crow was perched on a tree, with a piece of cheese in its beak, when a fox approached and said to it: "Good morning, illustrious master crow. How beautiful you are! What feathers, what splendour!"⁵ And, continuing to praise

it, the fox asked it to sing in order to hear its "wonderful" voice. The crow, thinking its cawing was a harmonious melody, opened its beak and sang, while watching the cheese fall and be snatched by the fox... The author places the moral of the story on the lips of the most cunning of animals: "My good sir, learn that the flatterer lives at the expense of those who pay him heed. This lesson was certainly worth a piece of cheese."⁶

Let us be careful, however, not only with flatterers, but also with that kind of friend who is overly eager for our triumphs, always present in happy moments, for the companions that are unailing in times of joy are rarely so in sorrow. In this sense, God's wisdom rightly advises us: "When you gain a friend, gain him through testing, and do not trust him hastily. For there is a friend who is such at his own convenience, but will not stand by you in your day of trouble. And there is a friend who changes into an enemy, and will disclose a quarrel to your disgrace. And there is a friend who is a table

companion, but will not stand by you in your day of trouble” (Sir 6:7-10).

Allergic to failure: the traitor

Now let us look at the other side of the coin. It is said that “a sure friend is known in unsure times.”⁷ But we could also say – and with even greater reason – that the *false friend* is known in unsure times: his absence condemns him.

In this perspective, Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira⁸ narrated a very eloquent event. Once, while in a restaurant, he observed a sad and meditative young man, talk-

ing to the owner of the place: “When I had both my legs,” he lamented, “I lived surrounded by friends and was very well-liked. Since I lost a leg, my friends have abandoned me.”

What an unhappy man, one might say, for he has lost his friends! But let us analyse this: what kind of friends were they? A true friend does not look for two legs, but for a soul that he can help to reach Heaven. Happy was this young man: losing his leg, he freed himself from the enemies of his salvation. Furthermore, suffering and even isolation made him a mature person, capable of questioning the reason for the events of his life. What a gift: Providence did not give him friends, but delivered him from his enemies.

This episode nonetheless demonstrates how bad friends abandon us when we need them most. And their



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Bad friends abandon us when we need them most. And their path does not end there, because unfortunately the bad friend is a potential traitor

“The expulsion of the prodigal son”, by Lambert Doomer

path does not end there, because unfortunately the bad friend is a potential traitor: “Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted his heel against me” (Ps 41:9). It is enough to recall the sad story of Judas, the bad friend par excellence, who had the impudence to betray Jesus Christ with a cynical gesture of friendship, a dirty and infamous kiss (cf. Mt 26:48-49).

The remedy: salutary, efficient, unique

Accomplice, flatterer, eager for triumphs, allergic to setbacks, and traitor: these are some traits that make up the moral physiognomy of a bad friend. However, none of this constitutes the essence of harmful company; these are merely symptoms. A friendship is harmful when it leads us

astray from the path to Heaven. In other words, whoever leads us to sin or separates us from virtue is a bad friend – or rather, an enemy of our soul.

Now, how can we avoid being influenced by bad friendships? There is only one remedy: to distance ourselves from them.

Common sense and experience advise it: one rotten fruit spoils the whole bunch. And Scripture reiterates: “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (1 Cor 5:6); “Whoever touches pitch will be defiled, and whoever asso-

ciates with a proud man will become like him” (Sir 13:1). Even solitude is better company than a bad friend, as the saying goes: “Better alone than in bad company.”

We can all attest that contact with people who lead us to sin is one of the most dangerous obstacles to salvation. Aware of this, St. Paul already exhorted the first Christians: “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals’” (1 Cor 15:33).

If we are vigilant about our friendships, by Our Lady’s favour we will certainly move forward towards beatific and eternal friendship, for, in a certain sense, a man’s life can be defined by the quality of friends he has had. It would not be surprising to hear from God in the particular judgement: “Tell me who your friends were, and I will tell you where you will go.” ✚

¹ Cf. PLUTARCH. *How to Profit by One’s Enemies*, 86C.

² Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Theologiae*. II-II, q.114, a.1.

³ Cf. CICERO, Marcus Tullius. *Laelius de amicitia*, c.XXII, n.83.

⁴ Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, op. cit., q.115, a.1.

⁵ LA FONTAINE, Jean de. *Fábulas*. São Paulo: Melhoramentos, 1962, p.50.

⁶ *Ibid*, p.50-51.

⁷ “*Amicus certus in re incerta cernitur*” (CICERO, op. cit., c.XVII, n.64).

⁸ Cf. CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. *Conference*. São Paulo, 12/10/1972.



Adulation: Is it a Sin?

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

§ 2480 Every word or attitude is forbidden which by flattery, adulation, or complaisance encourages and confirms another in malicious acts and perverse conduct. Adulation is a grave fault if it makes one an accomplice in another's vices or grave sins. Neither the desire to be of service nor friendship justifies duplicitous speech. Adulation is a venial sin when it only seeks to be agreeable, to avoid evil, to meet a need, or to obtain legitimate advantages.

The excerpt from the *Catechism* points to three interconnected sins: flattery, adulation, and complaisance. It focuses on the second, whose meaning is “seduction through false praise.”¹ Its Latin etymology, *adulari*, goes back to the *act of caressing* – especially animals. At its core, the flatterer is a caresser of another’s ego.

However, a fundamental question arises: is all praise a sinful act? St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that praise can be licit or illicit, depending on the circumstances.

To praise someone with the aim of consoling them in tribulations, encouraging their efforts, or favouring their progress in good, constitutes an act of charity, according to the virtue of friendship.² Similarly, it is in accordance with reason to honour superiors for their dignity or excellence, through the virtue of *dulia*, which pays honour to whom it is due.³ The recognition of another’s merit is not only permitted, but, in certain cases, a duty of justice.

Indeed, friendship and *dulia* derive from the cardinal virtue of justice, defined as that by which “a man renders to each one his due by a constant and perpetual will” or “rendering to each one his right.”⁴

From this perspective, it is possible to understand the malice of the flatterer, who, although he seems to act

in accordance with justice when paying honours, in reality acts against it by seeking personal advantages in a fraudulent way. He encourages falsehood, attributing non-existent qualities to others, exaggerating existing ones, or, worse, showing approval of reprehensible conduct. He further offends justice in that justice demands truthfulness for harmonious coexistence among men. The other side of the coin is detraction, which adulterates the truth to damage the reputation of others.

In contrast, although it “intends chiefly the pleasure of those among whom one lives,” the virtue of friendship “does not fear to displease when it is a question of obtaining a certain good, or of avoiding a certain evil.”⁵

In the Thomistic view, as taken from the *Catechism*, flattery is always a mortal sin when it offends charity, approving of or encouraging the grave sin of one’s neighbour. It will be a venial sin if it is motivated by the desire to please, avoid evil, or obtain something necessary.⁶

Under the mask of courtesy, flattery penetrates social dealings in a cunning, almost imperceptible way.

Circumspection is urgently needed, for “a man who flatters his neighbour spreads a net for his feet” (Prv 29:5). And the consequences can be very pernicious: “The tongue of the flatterer does more harm than the hand of the murderer.”⁷ The flatterer does not kill the body, he kills the truth and the soul. ✠

¹ ST. AUGUSTINE. *Sermon 353*, c.1.

² Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Theologiae*. II-II, q.115, a.1, ad 1.

³ Cf. *ibid.*, q.103, *in toto*.

⁴ *Ibid.*, q.58, a.1.

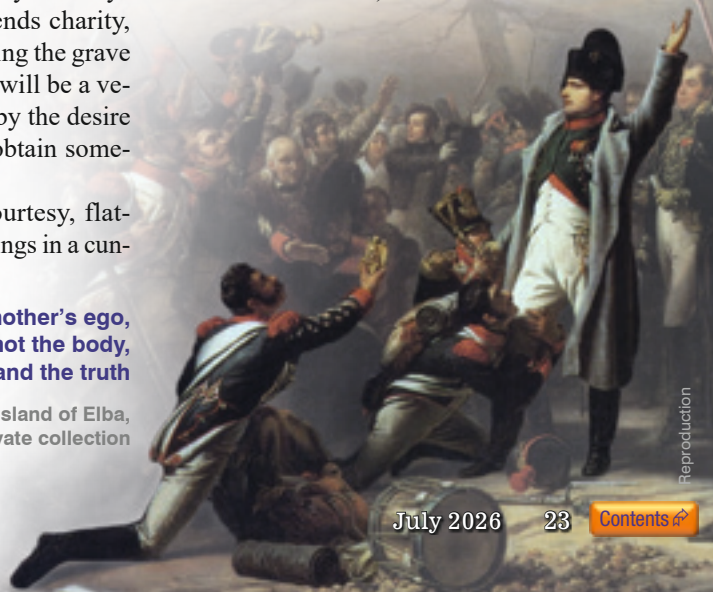
⁵ *Ibid.*, q.115, a.1.

⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, a.2.

⁷ ST. AUGUSTINE. *Enarrationes in Psalmos*. Psalmum LXIX, n.5.

**Caressing another’s ego,
the flatterer kills not the body,
but the soul and the truth**

Napoleon’s return from the Island of Elba,
by Charles de Steuben - Private collection





The Flower of Human Relationships

Friendships are always of consequence before Providence and in history, however insignificant they may seem in our own eyes. This is proven by various examples that illuminated the pages of the Old Testament.



✦ Mariana Xavier

In creating us with an instinct for sociability, the Divine Craftsman imprinted on the human soul the need for mutual help. In the reciprocal admiration of the gifts received by each one, we are called to better serve Him, love Him, and praise Him.

This interdependence is not reduced to a certain convenience, but reveals itself as an evident and undeniable reality. No one is, by himself, his own teacher or his own doctor; we are, by

nature, contingent beings. And this dependence transcends the material plane: in the supernatural realm, we need each other to tread the path of virtue and fulfil our vocation.

In this vast interweaving of dependencies, friendship emerges as a sublime support in the pursuit of holiness. God Himself, made man, wished to enjoy friendship with the Apostles (cf. Jn 15:15) and Lazarus (cf. Jn 11:11) as His intimates.

However, long before the Incarnation, the pages of the Old Testament already offered us luminous teachings in this regard, among which the following passage from Sirach stands out:

“A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter: he that has found one has found a treasure. There is nothing so precious as a faithful friend, and no scales can measure his excellence. A faithful friend is an elixir of life; and those who fear the Lord will find him. Whoever fears the Lord directs his friendship aright, for as he is, so is his neighbour also” (6:14-17).

Let us consider each of these phrases carefully, based on three Old Testament examples of true friendship.

“He loved him as his own soul”

The loyal union between David and Jonathan stands out as the best-known example of friendship in the Old Covenant.

King Saul, Jonathan’s father, had transgressed, betraying his mission, and the prophet Samuel had warned him that God would choose another monarch in his place. Therefore, upon perceiving evident signs of divine predilection towards David, who had indeed been anointed by the prophet, Saul became envious and harboured a mortal hatred for him.



Leandro Souza

In creating us with an instinct for sociability, the Divine Craftsman imprinted on the human soul the need for mutual help. In reciprocal admiration of the gifts, we are called to better serve Him, love Him, and praise Him

A meal at Tabor Formation House, Caieiras (Brazil)

Jonathan's soul, however, was drawn to David, whom he loved as himself (cf. 1 Sm 18:1). Although the ascension of Jesse's son meant that he would lose the throne, to which he would have been entitled by inheritance, at no time did he envy the one whom he had taken as a friend. On the contrary, he told him: "you shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you" (1 Sm 23:17). Nor was he afraid to confront his own father, warning David of the plans and schemes plotted against him and protecting him so that he would not be killed by Saul.

Based on phrases from a dialogue between Jonathan and Saul, St. Aelred of Rievaulx highlights the beauty of the attitude taken by the former: "When he [Saul] pronounced a death sentence against David, Jonathan did not abandon his friend. 'Why should David be put to death? What has he done?' [...] At these words, mad with rage, the king tried to pierce Jonathan with a spear against the wall [...]. Then he spewed forth all his venom upon the young man's heart, adding encouragement for his ambition, fuel for his envy, and inciting rivalry and bitterness: 'As long as the son of Jesse lives, your kingdom shall not be established.' Who would not be shaken by such words? Who would not be filled with envy? What love, what affection, what friendship would they not corrupt, diminish, or cause to be forgotten? Jonathan, a young man full of love, kept the pact of friendship. Strong against threats, patient against fury, he despised the kingdom because of friendship, forgetting the glories, but remembering the grace."¹ Despising glory and power, he preferred the honour of his friend to his own.

"A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter: he that has found one has found a treasure" (Sir 6:14). We can well af-



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Jonathan saved not only the life of his friend, but also his descendants, from whom the Messiah would be born centuries later

Saul orders David's death, and Jonathan warns him of it, illumination from the Morgan Bible - Pierpont Morgan Library, New York

firm that Jonathan, whose friendship was more precious to David than any other earthly affection (cf. 2 Kgs 1:26), saved not only the life of his friend, but also his descendants, from whom the Messiah would be born centuries later.

A friendship more precious than seven sons!

Going back to the genealogy of the God-Man, as presented at the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew (cf. Mt 1:1-16), it may seem strange that Ruth, the great-grandmother of King David and one of the few women mentioned in the list, was not Jewish, but Moabite. However, she deserved the honour of being an ancestor of the Messiah, as her story shows.

Ruth – a Hebrew name meaning "friend" – married Mahlon, the son of a Jewish widow named Naomi. Naomi also had a second son, Chilion, who was married to another Moabite woman named Orpah. However, both of Naomi's sons died, leaving her completely alone. Resigned to her fate, the old woman then called her young daughters-in-law and insisted that they return to their families, where they could remarry and start a new life.

Orpah was very distressed, for she cherished her mother-in-law, but in the

end she left. Ruth, however, unwilling to abandon her, replied: "Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if even death parts me from you" (Ru 1:16-17). Leaving her nation and customs, she entered the service of Naomi.

From that moment on, Ruth's companionship became her mother-in-law's inheritance. And God rewarded this act of generosity by granting Ruth the opportunity to marry again, to a wealthy relative of Naomi named Boaz, and to give birth to a son. Thus, the sorrow of the virtuous widow was transformed into consolation, as Scripture narrates: "Then the women said to Naomi, 'Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next of kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him'" (Ru 4:14-15).

Ruth's loyal and selfless friendship lived up to the praise of Sirach: "There is nothing so precious as a faithful



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**Ruth's loyal and selfless friendship lived up to the praise of Sirach:
"There is nothing so precious as a faithful friend,
and no scales can measure his excellence"**

Noemi and Ruth, by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

friend, and no scales can measure his excellence" (Sir 6:15).

"The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha"

Going a little further through the pages of Israel's history, we find the figures of Elijah and Elisha, not only in a bond of master and disciple, but as two souls drawn by the same fire of divine zeal, merging into an alliance of unbreakable friendship.

Regarding Elijah, Scripture affirms: "Blessed are they that saw thee, and were honoured with thy friendship" (Ecclus 48:11), which applies especially to Elisha, who not only lived with him, but also placed himself at his service in a relationship of profound affection.

The calling of Elisha to the prophetic mission, narrated in the First Book of Kings, reveals the immediacy of a spirit that, upon finding a true friend, abandons everything without hesitation. He was working in the field when Elijah approached and threw his mantle over

his chosen one. This man, immediately abandoning his plough, ran after the one who had confiscated him and, after saying goodbye to his family, set out to serve him, embracing a communion of life (cf. 1 Kgs 19:19-21). Elisha found in Elijah an "other self."

Walking together, three times Elijah ordered him to let him go on alone, and three times he received the same refusal: "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you" (2 Kgs 2:2, 4, 6). Elisha's affectionate adherence to Elijah continued to grow each day, as clearly demonstrated by the episode in which this great prophet was carried away in a chariot of fire (cf. 2 Kgs 2:11-12). The biblical account reveals the anguish over the imminent separation of the two, who were one soul and one heart.

Because of this authentic friendship, proven in the communion of ideals, Elisha received as an inheritance a double portion of Elijah's spirit, which is why the sons of the prophets, seeing

him part the waters of the Jordan, exclaimed: "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha" (2Kgs 2:15). It was a tangible seal of the union between those two souls.

"A faithful friend is an elixir of life; and those who fear the Lord will find him. Whoever fears the Lord directs his friendship aright, for as he is, so is his neighbour also" (Sir 6:16-17). Elisha, through his zeal in love, became another Elijah, immortalizing that bond in communion with the spirit of his master.

The seriousness of human relationships

These examples of true friendship show us that it is the pinnacle of human relationships, often becoming necessary for the fulfilment of divine designs in history.

Indeed, were it not for Ruth's faithfulness to Naomi, King David would not have been born, and the lineage of the Messiah would have been interrupted. Again, David may not even have ascended the throne if it were not for the loyal friendship of Jonathan. And what would have become of the Israelites if there had not been Elijah and Elisha to transmit God's word to them and free them from the sin of idolatry? Moreover, their friendship constituted the first link in the Eliatic line which, having sprung up among the prophets of Mount Carmel, blossomed centuries later in the Carmelite Order.

We can thereby grasp the seriousness of our relationships with our neighbour, which will be of greater or lesser consequence before Providence in accordance with each person's calling. Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, may that interrelationship filled with mutual respect and loyal, vigorous affection which should characterize the Marian era promised by her at Fatima be established among men without delay. ✠

¹ ST. AELRED OF RIEVAULX. *De spirituali amicitia*. L.III: PL195, 693.



Is it More Meritorious to Love an Enemy or a Friend?



✠ Fr. Cyril Avinash, EP

The coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the revelation of the commandment of love profoundly transformed human relationships. Until then, justice was limited to the rigour of the law of retaliation: “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (Ex 21:24). By uttering the divine words: “Do good to those who hate you” (Mt 5:44), the Master elevated human coexistence to an unprecedented level, transcending mere reciprocity.

Considering this, it appears more meritorious to love an enemy than a friend. Daily experience attests to the difficulty of this task... Our Lord himself asks: “Love your enemies [...]. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?” (Mt 5:44, 46). Accordingly, it would seem logical to infer that what requires greater effort is also more meritorious.

In an article dedicated to this topic (cf. *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q.27, a.7), Aquinas poses the inverse question: what would be worse, to hate a friend or an enemy? The answer leaves no room for doubt: to hate a friend, who is closest to us and loves us, constitutes a much more serious fault. By symmetry, the Common Doctor concludes with all simplicity: “It is better to love the best,” for the friend who loves

us is better than the enemy who hates us, and what is better is necessarily more meritorious.

Someone might object that love for friends can often be tainted by egoism, self-interest, hedonism, etc., whereas love for one’s enemy requires love for God as its motive. The Angelic Doctor concedes that this objection is well-founded, adding that love for God is

revealed more intensely when it expands the human heart to embrace distant objects, such as enemies, “just as the power of fire manifests itself all the stronger the farther it spreads its heat.” This capacity for extension obviously calls for more “fuel,” which is none other than the virtue of charity.

Aquinas further inquires: and what about love for a friend grounded on love for God? Returning to the same metaphor, he observes that fire acts with more vigour on what is closer than on what is distant. Analogously, true charity makes us love those closest to us with greater fervour. Such love is not only more ardent, but it is also more meritorious, for it has God Himself as its cause – and not mere human affection.

For these reasons, St. Thomas Aquinas offers us a valuable lesson: love for friends, when restricted to mere companionship, lacks supernatural merit. However, if we love our neighbour with true charity, we will not only attain the fullness of God’s grace – “charity, which is the bond of perfection” (Col 3:14) – but we will also be worthy heirs of the first Christians, the object of exclamation even from pagans: “See how they love one another!” (Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, ch. XXXIX, n. 7). ✠



With the new commandment of love, Our Lord raised human coexistence to a level that transcends mere reciprocity

The meeting between St. Dominic and St. Francis, by Fra Angelico - The Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

Seilko (CC by 3.0)



The Joy of Doing Good

Respect, kindness, and selflessness seem to be increasingly absent from human relationships. As a result, the joy of social interaction is dwindling... What could restore the sweetness of life to society?

✦ **Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira**

The topic of chivalrous treatment reminds me of a lot of things from my childhood, when the issues of relationships and life in society were beginning to emerge in my mind.

Friendship in the old days

My mother used to tell stories about acquaintances who were true friends, but astonishingly so. She would narrate, for example, what happened with my grandfather.

He had inherited some land in the interior of São Paulo. At that time – well over a hundred years ago – Pirassununga, Araraquara, São Carlos, those regions that are so close to us, were part of the hinterland.

My grandfather decided to establish a farm. However, he had been educated in the city of São Paulo and had no idea about rural life. A childhood friend of his, who had business in that area, passed by my grandfather's property, saw that it was poorly organized, and went to talk to him. They both addressed each other by their childhood nicknames: the friend, named Estanislau, was called Lalau; and my grandfather, Antônio, Totó.

Lalau said to Totó:

“Look, Totó, your farm is a disgrace! You need to give me some more labourers, and don't even think about your farm, don't show up there, don't ask me anything. Just give me a cheque for this amount each year to cover expenses. In five years, I'll give you a fully developed farm, with a producing coffee plantation, and a bank account opened by me in your name to hold the profits.

My grandfather thought it was a very interesting idea; he provided La-

lau with the necessary labourers, and did not interfere in the farm's affairs any further. They did not even talk about the matter. When the deadline had passed, Lalau – who, incidentally, was a baron of the empire – sought out my grandfather and said:

“Look, Totó, let's go and see your farm now. It's ready; you'll be pleased.”

They went together, and it was a thing of beauty, in full bloom. Then my grandfather wanted to pay him, but Lalau replied:

“Don't even mention it; it's out of the question! Because I did this out of friendship for you.”

I looked at my companions and wondered: “Who does that these days?” In my childhood, either you paid very well – and still checked the accounts to see if there had been any theft – or it ended in disaster. And this question remained in my mind: “Is the age of friendship over?”

Conversations imbued with a special respect

I used to watch the older generation – people the age of my parents and especially of my grandparents – and I noticed how differently they interacted: they treated one another with a respect that no longer existed in my generation.

My grandmother had a friend with whom she remained close until the end



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“I observed the older generation, people the age of my parents and especially of my grandparents, and I noticed how differently they interacted: they treated one another with a respect that no longer existed in my generation”

Dr. Antônio and Dona Gabriela, Dr. Plinio's maternal grandparents

of her life. They were two exceptionally beautiful ladies, not only because they had such fine features – like porcelain dolls – but because they were so refined and elegant.

The two had met as young girls. Their homes, in the tiny São Paulinho of that time, were relatively close together. There were no telephones, and a young woman could only go out on the street with a family member; never alone. So they – often wanting to meet up, but with no one to accompany them – would, at a set time, stand at the windows of their respective homes with binoculars, and signal to one another, communicating through gestures, chatting.

Both later lived on ranches in the countryside of São Paulo and went several years without seeing each other, as their estates were very far apart. Later, their husbands returned to live in São Paulo and they resumed their friendship.

I met them when they were already quite elderly. This lady used to visit my grandmother every week, on a fixed day. They would sit down and the conversation would begin. Usually someone from the family would turn up and join in the conversation for a while, but would soon withdraw, because they liked to talk about matters from their own time and their memories. It was kinder to leave them on their own.

But I regretted it, because I wanted to listen to their conversation – it was entertaining the whole time! When the visit was over, they would say goodbye in such a festive, solemn and beautiful way that it was a joy to watch. More than once I went into the room to watch the two of them bid each other farewell.

Transformations in forms of courtesy

In our family, we formed a circle of cousins and had very lively conversations, but they were not like they used to be. I saw this difference and won-



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“In my generation people treated each other politely, but this politeness was very common and cinematic. Authentic courtesy was dying, giving way simply to correct treatment, but without the sweetness of yesteryear”

Dr. Plinio in 1992

dered: what has disappeared, transforming social interaction in such a way? I needed to analyse it quite a bit to know the answer.

The first notion that came to mind was that in my generation people treated each other politely, but this politeness was very common and cinematic. Authentic courtesy was dying, giving way simply to correct treatment, but without the sweetness of yesteryear.

On one occasion, while reading a French book written by a very interesting historian, Gosselin Lenôtre, *Gens de la Vieille France* – The People of Old France, I found a phrase by Talleyrand: “Whoever did not live before the French Revolution did not know the sweetness of living.”

I thought to myself: “That’s right! These cities with factories, trams, cars, horns, electric lights – São Paulo already had all that, on a smaller scale, it just didn’t have airplanes – the hustle and bustle, trains and everything else... It is impossible for the old *douceur de vivre* to exist in this atmosphere.”

The joy of bringing joy

However, the question arose: how did those people experience life and manage to act like that? What was their way of being? Why did it end? A boy, observing things from this side, was naturally led to ask these questions.

In my grandmother’s house there was a large garden. On Thursdays, all the children would gather there, run around, have fun, etc. An uncle of mine would arrive when the excitement reached its peak. In those days, certain infractions of good manners were not tolerated. Then the playing would stop and all the children would go to kiss this uncle’s hand and ask him how he was doing.

He took particular pleasure in bringing back, every now and then, a few packets of delicious foreign sweets filled with fruit jelly. If he did not bring them, we would treat him the same way. But I noticed that he felt a certain pleasure in seeing us happy. Choosing between having a few extra banknotes in his wallet or seeing

the joy it brought us – and the way that joy reflected back on him – my uncle preferred the pleasure of giving, which was well worth the cost.

Sometimes I witnessed people older than me performing small acts of kindness. For example, I remember a gentleman who came to visit our house. He entered with two beautiful cactus flowers and said, “I found these at a florist I passed. They are pretty, and perhaps you will like them,” and he gave them to the lady of the house, his sister-in-law, who was very pleased and had them placed in a small vase near her. I noticed how he rejoiced in knowing that the lady would spend the rest of the afternoon looking at those flowers. Regardless of any reciprocation, it gave him satisfaction to see the contentment of others.

It was a feeling corresponding to a social habit, which consisted of the joy of bringing joy, the satisfaction of causing satisfaction. It was a solidarity that bound one creature to another, whereby the pain in one hurt the other, what pleased one, pleased the other. The *douceur de vivre* was implanted and established.

Extinction of reciprocity and implantation of egoism

Looking to the past, I realized how great this sense of reciprocity was in previous generations, the further back in time one went. In my generation, it was almost gone; in our days, it has completely disappeared.

On the roads, for example, when an accident occurs, drivers are sometimes asked to stop so that an injured person



Wolfgang Sauber (CC by-sa 3.0)

Our Lord went through His life doing good, and He Himself gave example of that which He taught us: God is goodness, compassion and solicitude, until death on the Cross for our sake

Stained glass of the Church of St. John the Baptist, Cardiff (Wales)

can be placed inside their cars. I know of someone who gave this answer: “My car is new and his blood will dirty it. I don’t want to.” And he drove on.

So, a completely different moral climate is established, in which this reciprocity, the desire to do good for the other person’s sake, disappears. Similarly, respect vanishes: the joy because the other is superior, because of reverence, because of honouring him.

Any contentment in doing good has been lost, which, on the contrary, has become unpleasant. Therefore, it matters little to see others wither and perish, if one obtains one’s own good.

How can a conversation between two people be pleasant if each knows that the other has these ideas of self-importance? It is impossible not to perceive a certain melancholy in today’s

dealings. There is nervous excitement, but the joy for the happiness of the other has disappeared. How can it be explained that this existed for a period and then ceased to exist?

With Our Lord, joy began to radiate across the earth.

Someone entered history. When this happened, the whole world was a night like the one I have just described; He shone, and the joy of being good and doing good began to shine among men. The pleasure of respecting and even venerating, of dedicating oneself, of sacrificing oneself; the contentment of doing good, of knowing that the other was satisfied, even when he does not realize who favoured him; all this began to radiate across the earth through someone designated by four words: Our Lord

Jesus Christ.

St. Peter uses a formula that I read and that remained in my memory like a flash of light, never fading from my spirit. He described the life of Our Lord in this Latin summary: “*pertransivit benefaciendo*” (Acts 10:38), He went through life doing good. The whole time, from beginning to end, doing good, without looking at anything but the joy of doing good, with the overflowing, the abundance that we know. It reached its peak when He was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, and He gave the order to the executioners: “let these men go” (Jn 18:8). It was the disciples who were fleeing! They could have refused to flee, but they chose to flee. However, the forgiveness was such that He only had the expression: “let these men go.”

Furthermore: St. Peter cut off Malchus' ear. Jesus bent down, picked up the ear from the ground and put it back on him, who was arresting Him in order to subject Him to an unjust trial and kill Him with the most cruel death imaginable.

Our Lord taught and revealed that which He Himself exemplified: God is goodness, infinite majesty, endless splendour, unfathomable perfection and omnipotence; but also mercy, compassion and forgiveness repeatedly expressed with affection and solicitude even unto death on the Cross for us.

Jesus Christ loved us and loves us in this way. He founded a Church which is the sum of all perfections and all wonders, even amidst the sorrows of the 20th century: the more we know it, the more we admire it.

Therefore, through His teaching, He revealed to us that we have this common Father, this God who loves us in this way.

Doing good to others brings joy to Jesus Christ.

This gave men the notion that all are one in Him, participate in His feelings and dispositions, and thus, by doing good to others, we bring joy to Him.

St. Catherine of Siena once needed to care for a leper. She found satisfaction in bringing contentment to this sick woman; moreover, she knew that Our Lord Jesus Christ rejoiced in Heaven to see that miserable daughter smile happily, with her gaunt lips. The Redeemer loved the leper daughter, felt pity for her, and was pleased when another daughter, to whom He had given health, comforted her.

Thus arises the pleasure of respect. The other woman, who was neurasthenic and had an unbearable temperament, was referred to by the Saint as "my mother".

All this together fosters in men a well-ordered satisfaction in feeling the joy of others, the pleasure of giving,

of sacrificing oneself, of laying oneself down, of loosening the grip of selfishness, self-love and pride, through a gesture, through a kindness. A kind word can sometimes transform a person, especially when we do not feel like saying it, but do so to serve Our Lady.

A joyful fellowship, with the fragrance of Our Lord Jesus Christ

The pagans, in the time of the Roman Empire, looked at the Catholics and said to each other: "See how they love one another." It is the good aroma, the light of Our Lord Jesus Christ that illuminates and transforms everything.

I give you this advice: do you want to have true happiness in your soul and the light of Our Lord Jesus Christ before your eyes? Do you wish to feel in the breath of your souls His aroma?

Sacrifice yourselves and have the joy of seeing that others are pleased with the sacrifice.

And do not expect reward. Whoever does good to others for their own sake seeks to make a deal. Expect ingratitude, contempt, mistreatment, but say: "I did it so that he might be a little satisfied. Our Lord and His Blessed Mother were glorified, because he had a moment of good joy. This will one day redound to the benefit of his soul. I will do more!"

When they come to an understanding, the fragrance of their fellowship will be sweet, perfumed and pleasant. It is Christ our Lord who will be present. ✠

Taken, with adaptations for the written language, from: Conference. São Paulo, 10/6/1985



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If we are to have true happiness of soul and the light of Our Lord before our eyes, we must sacrifice ourselves for others without expecting repayment

"St. Catherine of Siena and the beggar", by Giovanni di Paolo - Art Museum of Cleveland (Ohio)



A Pinch of Salt in the Sweetness of Life

In the France of yesteryear, politeness was neither an artificial nor a pretentious custom, but rather the embodiment of respect, elegance and benevolence in the minutiae of daily life. These mild manners were not, however, without a good dose of wit.



✠ Fr. Felipe Ramos, EP

Following the bitter years of the French Revolution (1789–1799), the diplomat Talleyrand, reflecting on the collapse of the *Ancien Régime*, left a nostalgic account: “Those who did not live in the 18th century, before the Revolution, do not know the sweetness of life.”¹

Without turning a blind eye to the dark side of the French absolutist regime of the 16th to 18th centuries, we must acknowledge one of its great legacies: the refinement of good manners, that is, politeness. This, as the word itself suggests, polishes and refines actions, words and behaviours. It transcends mere etiquette, symbolizing, in human interaction, an effort to smooth out the rough edges of social life and favour civility.

Under the *Ancien Régime*, Paris was the beacon of the world, the City of Light that radiated culture across the globe. There, good manners permeated everything from the grand palace salons to the villages and their everyday interactions. It is said that Goethe, the most famous German writer, upon entering a small shop in Longwy, north-eastern France, was greeted with such deference by the shop clerk that he, aware of his own less than “sweet” manners, felt compelled to raise his own level of courtesy to match the gentility of his

interlocutor.² Similarly, an Austrian nobleman, also travelling through France, noticed that the coachman went about with a work by the writer Corneille. Impressed, he exclaimed: “What a country! What a people! Even the coachmen read the classics!”³

Indeed, the France of yesteryear excelled so greatly in graciousness that its customs clashed with those of other nations less accustomed to the *douceur de vivre*. Rather incisively, the sardonic Montesquieu remarked: “The English are too busy; they have no time to be civilized.”⁴ It seems, perhaps, that the French writer’s own schedule was a bit demanding...

The adornment of virtues

In those golden days, courtesy was intertwined with Western civilization. Contrary to popular belief, politeness was neither an artificial nor a pretentious custom, but rather the embodiment of respect, elegance and benevolence in the minutiae of daily life. It is undeniable that good manners can degenerate into hypocrisy, a mere mask of virtue. Even scoundrels are capable of displaying a certain civility... but abuse does not preclude proper use.

Courtesy was, above all, the adornment of virtues. It was imbued with the fraternal charity advocated in Scripture:

“You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Lv 19:18; Mt 22:39). For this reason, in response to the hypocrites, the French coined the expression *politeness of the heart* to indicate that civility springs from within, from a virtuous life.

Now, the “science of good manners” proves to be “indispensable to men’s happiness and virtue.”⁵ And as Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira so aptly put it, “courtesy is the musicality of human relations.”⁶ In short, virtue resembles a painting, whose frame is called politeness.

Christ: a model of good manners

In the art of living together, humility is the cornerstone and the antidote to selfishness and incivility. Christ taught us this lesson through His own life: He was “gentle and lowly in heart” (Mt 11:29) and the “Master of humility.”⁷ Before sending the Apostles out to preach, “He appointed twelve, to be with Him” (Mk 3:14). Jesus wished, above all, to live in community. Thus, the Word did not become incarnate solely to redeem humanity from sin, but also to introduce a new way of life (cf. Acts 5:20).

Balzac was right to remark that “true politeness presupposes Christian thought; it is like the flower of

charity, and consists in truly forgetting oneself.”⁸ There is an almost liturgical dimension to civility: it harmonizes self-denial, kindness and reverence, transforming everyday life into a ritual of mutual elevation. Like the rubrics of a Missal, the rules of courtesy curb individualism, while honouring actions and exhorting us to the sublime.

Politeness goes hand in hand with graciousness

However, politeness must be tempered with firmness: “Being courteous does not preclude being valiant,” as the Spanish proverb puts it. Thus, the *sweetness* of life sometimes requires a *pinch of salt* to season social interaction with flavours that are, shall we say, more robust... In this sense, the Apostle exhorts: “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer every one” (Col 4:6). Merely formal social interaction is insipid. To make it palatable, it needs to be seasoned with grace, lightness and a touch of cheer.

An episode involving Napoleon III (1808–1873) illustrates that courtesy, when devoid of wisdom, becomes insipid, whereas “salt”, used in moderation, is the spirited seasoning of life’s salads.⁹

One day, upon returning exhausted to his chambers, the emperor grew irritated by the constant complaints of his wife Eugénie. In a fit of pique, he snapped:

“Do you know the difference between you and a mirror?”

“No!” she replied.

“It’s that the mirror reflects and you don’t...”



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Courteousness has an almost liturgical dimension: it harmonizes abnegation, kindness and reverence, transforming everyday life into a ritual of mutual elevation

A salutation in the 18th century, by Jules Marie-Auguste Leroux

The empress didn’t let it go at that: “Now, do you know the difference between *you* and a mirror?”

Faced with her husband’s mystified negative, Eugénie concluded:

“It’s that a mirror is polished and you aren’t!”...

After the “spicy” but good-humoured argument, they smiled sweetly at one another...

Rediscovering the joy of conviviality

Let us leave the France of yesterday behind and return to the present day, a time of haste, of irreverence, of encounters increasingly mediated by

technology. Is there still room for politeness? More than ever!

Through good manners, it is possible to rediscover the original flavour of human coexistence. It must never be nourished by bitterness, the fruit of so many sins – especially envy. Nor by sourness, a direct consequence of one of the cardinal sins of our century: impatience.

The recipe lies in restoring wisdom – *sapientia*, a virtue whose etymology points to the Latin *sapor* – flavour. The wise know how regulate, to flavour things in just the right measure: sometimes by sweetening, sometimes by salting... ❖

¹ TALLEYRAND-PÉRIGORD, Charles-Maurice. *La confession*. Paris: L. Sauvaitre, 1891, p.57.

² Cf. LENÔTRE, G. *Réveries d’après guerre sur des thèmes anciens*. La douceur de vivre. In: *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Paris. Year XXXIX. No. 2 (May 15, 1917); p.362.

³ Ibid.

⁴ MONTESQUIEU, Charles de. *Pensées diverses*. In: *Œuvres*. Paris: Dalibon, 1827, t.VI, p.311.

⁵ LENÔTRE, op. cit., p.359.

⁶ CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. *Musicalidade das relações humanas* [The Musicality of Human Relations].

In: *Dr. Plinio*. São Paulo. Year XIX. No. 224 (Nov., 2016); p.2.

⁷ BOSSUET, Jacques-Bénigne. *Abrégé d’un autre sermon pour le troisième dimanche de l’Avent*. In: *Sermons*. 2.ed. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1886, t.I, p.293.

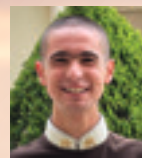
⁸ BALZAC, Honoré de. *Le lys dans la vallée*. In: *Œuvres complètes*. Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1869, t.V, p.511.

⁹ Cf. LEE, Elizabeth. *Wives of the Prime Ministers*. London: Nisbet, 1918, p.90-91.



The Fiery One

✦ Rúben Manuel Cunha



If God called Abraham *friend*, Isaac *my servant* and Jacob *my holy one*, He might well call Elijah *my prophet*. All the more so because, at the Transfiguration, Our Lord summoned neither the friend nor the holy one, but he who combined both attributes with prophecy: “How glorious you were, O Elijah, in your wondrous deeds! And who has the right to boast which you have?” (Sir 48:4).

Innocent as some, holy as few, fiery as no other, he was a sun to the people of Israel: he illuminated their paths, warmed their hearts with zeal for the Law, dried up idolatrous worship and burned it in the Valley of Kishon. Yet unlike the sun, his brilliance never set.

Martyr, judge and miracle worker

When God wants to speak in the course of history, He communicates with His closest friends, the prophets, unmistakable heralds of His will. And since the human will does not always coincide with the divine – to say the least – prophets must fight against a great deal of human respect and mediocrity, facing the hatred of a city or a people at a precise time, and becoming a torch of fidelity and martyrdom, in which the burning wick is himself.

It is, therefore, with a clarion call of fidelity that Elijah bursts into history. In the decadent history of the chosen people...

Israel was going through serious difficulties. Passing from one unstable situation to another, the kingdom came into the hands of an insecure and un-

faithful man, whom Scripture accuses of being even worse than all his predecessors (cf. 1 Kgs 16:30): Ahab. As if it were not enough that he had married a pagan woman – a crime forbidden by God Himself (cf. Dt 7:1-4), given the danger of idolatry – he also introduced the worship of Baal into the temple he had built: “There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited” (1 Kgs 21:25). A tremendous punishment was ravaging the Promised Land because of the sin of its inhabitants.

The only remedy for the situation was a bitter one, but Elijah was not afraid to administer it, and in his capacity as a man of God he commanded the clouds not to produce rain: “By the word of the Lord he shut up the heavens, and also three times brought down fire” (Sir 48:3). It was the most fitting of corrections, as St. Ambrose comments, who sees in it a “just punishment to adequately repress the lack of temperance, closing the heavens to the wicked who had defiled the things of the earth.”¹

It was in this interim that Elijah, by divine order, arrived in Zarephath of Sidon. After subjecting the widow who hosted him to a tremendous test of confidence – culminating in her seeing her son die – he performed the first resurrection narrated in the Scriptures. There is no indication that the prophet hesitated to perform this miracle; in fact his prayer, preceded by filial complaint, is more like an order given to God than a contingent plea: “O Lord my God, hast Thou brought calamity even upon the

Like a sun for Israel, he illuminated their paths, warmed their hearts and burned away the idolatrous worship in the Valley of Kishon. Yet there is one thing that sets him apart from the sun: his radiance has never known nightfall...

Elizabeth Tren

widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son? [...] let this child's soul come into him again" (1 Kgs 17:20-21). The Lord heard Elijah's prayer, and the boy's life was restored.

Unrivaled denouncer

The drought decreed by the prophet lasted for three long years (cf. 1 Kgs 18:1), and only then did the Most High order him to appear before Ahab, perhaps hoping for a retraction from the wicked monarch... Far from it, the king accused him of being the cause of the problems plaguing the country: "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?" (1 Kgs 18:17). Elijah, whose diplomacy more resembled a lightning bolt than a fencing stroke, rebuked him by summoning Jezebel's prophets to a sacrifice on Mount Carmel, in order to clearly demonstrate who the true God was.

In an instant, Ahab gathered all the prophets of Baal at the appointed place. Elijah also appeared. The result was

quite telling: eight hundred and fifty pagan priests against a single servant of Yahweh. Why instigate a public manifestation of who the true God was? Did this not evoke a certain pride and recklessness? Would it not have been more prudent, more diplomatic, to retreat to a cave in prayer, waiting for divine vengeance to visit those wicked people? No. It was necessary for the people who were limping on both feet (cf. 1 Kgs 18:21) to know the truth and, through it, follow the right path. This is one of the characteristics of the prophet: to distinguish truth from error.

Breaking the silence that covered Mount Carmel, Elijah proposed: "'the God who answers by fire, He is God.' And all the people answered, 'It is well spoken'" (1 Kgs 18:24).

The priests of Baal quickly prepared a bull and, in the morning, began to pray. Dancing, singing, supplications... nothing was enough to awaken the Canaanite deity. At noon, Elijah began to

mock them: "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is musing, or he has gone aside, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened" (1 Kgs 18:27). Stung in their pride and already somewhat uncertain about the truth of their religion, they slashed themselves with swords and spears, covering themselves in blood to move Baal. In vain. Nothing happened...

"Come near to me" (1 Kgs 18:30), Elijah finally exhorted. Erecting an altar to the Lord, he dug a trench around it and poured water over the altar and the sacrifice three times, flooding the trench. The people watched, spellbound. The prophet did not need to raise his arms, nor even a staff. At most, he raised his eyes to heaven and prayed: "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this



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Would it not have been more prudent to retreat, waiting for divine vengeance to visit those wicked people? No. It was necessary for those people who were limping on both feet to know the truth and, through it, to follow the right path. This is one of the characteristics of the prophet: to distinguish truth from error

"Elijah and the priests of Baal", by Lucas Cranach - Picture Gallery of the Old Masters, Dresden (Germany); on the previous page, St. Elijah - Mount Carmel House, Caieiras (Brazil)



people may know that Thou, O Lord, art God, and that Thou hast turned their hearts back” (1 Kgs 18:36-37).

Immediately the fire of the Lord descended, consuming not only the victim but also the stones of the altar and the water around it. The Lord had heard the prayer of the righteous one. The Baalites howled. Elijah prayed. And while the people worshiped the true God, the prophet commanded: “‘Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.’ And they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and killed them there” (1 Kgs 18:40).

The first devotee of Mary

After the scene was over, the man of God advised Ahab to eat and drink, for he already heard “a sound of the rushing of rain” (1 Kgs 18:41). Going up to the top of Mount Carmel, he prostrated himself on the ground and, seven times, sent his servant to look toward the sea. On the seventh time, the servant exclaimed: “Behold, a little cloud like a man’s hand is rising out of the sea” (1 Kgs 18:44). Elijah warned the king to hurry so that the rain would not stop him on his way. Ahab, who had already seen fire descend from Heaven at the prophet’s word, departed without losing a moment.

The authors agree in relating the small cloud, which announces a torrential storm, to the birth of the Blessed Virgin, who would bring to earth a deluge of graces and the God-Man Himself. The former was the fruit of a punishment; the latter, of immense forgiveness. It is certainly symbolic that the prefiguration of Mary appears on the horizon right after the defeat of idolatry. It is when false religion succumbs that Our Lady shines. Or, perhaps, the empire of Satan crumbles at the mere sound of her footsteps.



Francisco Lecaros

After a heroic act of fidelity to the true religion, God grants history the promise of a Mother for orphaned humanity

St. Elijah - Church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Caudete (Spain)

After a heroic act of fidelity to the true religion, God grants history the greatest prize up to that moment: the promise of a Mother for orphaned humanity.

The depository of fidelity

Now, returning to his home, Ahab hid none of these facts from Jezebel, whom he obeyed with true servitude. She seethed with rage and sent the prophet the following message: “So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow” (1 Kgs 19:2). Elijah was afraid and fled.

Those whom God loves with predilection are tried in a special way, in the very foundation of their axiology: the promise of their own vocation’s fulfilment, the certainty of vic-

tory. Thus, He allows and even brings about apparent denials and failures in the lives of his chosen ones. It was no different with Elijah. He, who had faced the hatred of an entire nation, who had avenged the Lord’s honour on Carmel, who would yet bring down fire from Heaven upon the soldiers of Ahaziah (cf. 2 Kgs 1:10-12), he who represented unbreakable fidelity... fled from a single woman.

Exhausted by the journey and the ordeal, Elijah collapsed under a juniper tree, saying: “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am no better than my fathers” (1 Kgs 19:4). Herein lies the prophet’s great perplexity. Called to be the man of all fidelities, he nevertheless feels the miseries of failure. And in this state, he fell asleep.

Over the course of a deep sleep, an Angel of the Lord twice gave him a hearth bread, which gave him strength to walk forty days and forty nights towards Mount Horeb. Commentators see in this mysterious food a prefiguration of the Eucharist. Elijah thus became the prophet of God’s two greatest treasures: the Blessed Virgin Mary and her Divine Son. Indeed, he would not be a true prophet of the Mother if he were not also a prophet of the Son.

The mountaintop usually represents, in the Holy Scriptures, the place of divine manifestation. It was on the mountaintop that Moses received the Law (cf. Ex 19, 20); It was on a similar site that the Incarnate Word was transfigured (cf. Mt 17:2).

When Elijah arrived at the top of Horeb, the Lord commanded him to wait for Him on the mountain. Hurricanes split the rocks, terrible earthquakes were felt, and even fire was present... but the Almighty was not in them. Finally, the murmur of a light breeze was heard. It was the God of



Israel passing by: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” Faced with this question, the prophet responded with a cry that would immortalize him in history and whose echo has lingered on the lips of humanity, whether for the most sincere praise or the most unjust antipathies: “With zeal have I been zealous for the Lord God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant: they have destroyed Thy altars, they have slain Thy prophets with the sword, and I alone am left, and they seek my life to take it away” (1 Kgs 19:14).

More than a man, a spirit

Elijah had taken faithfulness to the Lord to such a height that it was no longer possible to keep him among his own people. Not that the prophet feared the people. They were not worthy of him.

As the holy man resumed his journey through the desert, God did not lead him to Israel, but to Damascus. On the way, he anointed Elisha as a prophet in his place: he placed his mantle upon him, and the new disciple, renouncing everything, followed him. It is when the sun rises that it emits its most radiant splendours. Certainly, the meeting of the two

prophets was one of those moments that illuminated the dawn of an entire historical era, and that would serve as a paradigm of the relationship between founder and disciple, father and

son, until the end of the world. Elijah’s earthly mission was nearing its end.

At the moment of leave-taking, Elisha, addressing the one he had already begun to call father, implored what was necessary for the fulfilment of his own vocation: a “double share” (2 Kgs 2:9) of Elijah’s spirit. And, while they were talking, “a chariot of fire and horses of fire” (2 Kgs 2:11) separated them, carrying the prophet to Heaven in a fiery whirlwind.

If at dawn the most radiant gleams of the Sun are manifested, it is at sunset that the clouds are tinged with fire. It was in such a fiery firmament that Elisha contemplated his father depart and the double portion of the master’s spirit descend upon him.

Thus, the story of Elijah, far from being over, had just been immortalized in Elisha. This marked the beginning of what can be called the *Eliatic line*, a noble lineage of prophets devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose intrepid feats and heroic virtues are immortal, since they partake in the supernatural light of him who was once the sun of Israel. ✦



Those whom God loves with predilection are tried in a special way, in the very foundation of their axiology: the promise of their own vocation’s fulfilment

“The prophet Elijah being comforted in the desert by an Angel”, by Felipe Gil de Mena - National Museum of Sculpture, Valladolid (Spain); below, Mount Horeb - Sinai Peninsula (Egypt)

¹ ST. AMBROSE OF MILAN. *Elias y el ayuno*, c.II, n.2. Madrid: Ciudad Nueva, 2016, p.48.

Mohammed Moussa (CC by-sa 3.0)





An Unconditional Mother

Whether we are facing minor difficulties, a financial crisis, or even a fire... Dona Lucilia is always there to help us with whatever we ask of her, without hesitation.



✦ Elizabete Fátima Astorino

If my mother is as she is, [Our Lady], who is the Mother of mothers, the Mother of all humanity, I cannot imagine how She must be!"¹ Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira remarked on several occasions when speaking of Dona Lucilia and how her boundless affection and protection were for him a living incentive to have devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to confide in her help.

In our days, as if echoing his voice, hundreds of people also notice how Dona Lucilia's kindness brings us clos-

er to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and obtains from that Heart what we need at every moment.

"Dona Lucilia solves these problems"

Confirming these words, Mrs. Ariady Coneglian was heartened when an everyday need of hers was met, which led her to conclude: "I saw that Dona Lucilia has the characteristic of obtaining graces that are necessary in daily life."

In fact, Ariady works at a Catholic school located in the municipality of Ubiratã in the Brazilian state of Paraná. "It is a non-profit institution," she explains, "and a large part of what we receive is the result of donations. At the end of last year, we obtained approval from the Ministry of Cul-

ture allowing people to donate part of their income tax to us. However, we were having many problems getting the bank account opened for this purpose to actually receive the funds. I had to go to the bank seven times! And each time, a new problem arose: sometimes a document was missing, sometimes a signature wasn't accepted... In the end, when the account was finally activated, people were unable to make their donation. So, after fifteen days of trying to solve these problems, I reached the point of saying: 'I am giving up, because this is just not working out!'"

It was then that the director of the institution, a great devotee of Dona Lucilia, suggested: "Ariady, pray to Dona Lucilia, because there are many testimonies that she solves these kinds of problems." There was no need to repeat the advice, as she tells us: "I stopped what I was doing, sat down at the computer, and prayed: 'Dona Lucilia, help me! I need to resolve this account issue!'"

After this prayer, Ariady continued her work and, after a few minutes, an operation she had already tried to perform several times, in vain, on the bank's online portal came to mind. Although she had already given up on that transaction, she felt inspired to try again: "I went to the website and,



Ariady Coneglian, with a poster of Dona Lucilia

Her prayer answered, Ariady concluded that Dona Lucilia has the characteristic of obtaining favours for us that are necessary in everyday life

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Photos: Reproduction



The fuse box after the fire

with two clicks, I solved the problem, whereas before I had spent a long time trying and it hadn't worked! Minutes later, a colleague, who was having the same difficulty authorizing donations through another method – because there are several possible ways – also succeeded, which was a blessing for us! Of course, a small blessing compared to other more dramatic situations in life, but it helped us a lot! It was a great consolation from God! And I know it was through the intercession of Dona Lucilia, because I specifically asked her for that.”

Overjoyed with the result of the prayer, Ariady sent in her testimony as a way of expressing her gratitude and sharing this simple favour she received.

Fighting the fire, under heavenly protection

Also in the state of Paraná, this time in the city of Ponta Grossa, Dona Lucilia helped Mrs. Mylena Ferreira Campos in a household incident that could have resulted in tragedy.

A mother of four young children, Mylena is in the habit of invoking the protection and help of Dona Lucilia amidst her daily tasks, so as to perform her domestic chores well. One day, while getting the children ready in the morning, she needed to go to a certain room in the house to get an object, and in the hallway she came upon a fire that was just starting...

In fact, for the last few days a fuse box had seemed to be faulty, occasionally giving off a strong burning smell, and it had now caught fire. Mylena saw that the fire was burning the plastic cover of the fuse box and that a section of it, already burned away, had fallen to the floor. The flames were spreading rapidly and she had to act.

Here is her account of what happened: “I looked around and saw that the washing machine was working. The refrigerator in the kitchen was working too. There was light in the living room as usual... I thought: ‘My God, what now? How can I put out this fire? I need a good long cloth here, but I don't have any such thing...’”

Under the effect of the initial shock, the only idea that occurred to her at

the moment was to use water. However, it was an electrical fire, and liquids only fuel this type of flame, in addition to serving as a dangerous conduit for electricity...

However, while Mylena was fighting the blaze, she remembered to ask Dona Lucilia for help: “I filled a pot with water and started to put out the fire, first the one on the floor. And with each throw of water, I prayed: ‘Dona Lucilia, our mother, help us!’ The fire that was on the floor and on the wall went out. The fuse box and the circuit breakers were still burning. Again, I prayed: ‘Dona Lucilia, our mother, help us!’ And I threw water. The fire went out instantly.”

There was no short circuit or flare-up of the flames; and none of the various electrical appliances that were plugged into the sockets burned out. For Mylena, who only later fully realized what she had done, the success of her endeavours was due to the protection and constant assistance of her kind intercessor, Dona Lucilia.

“She will be your protective mother”

As a gift from Heaven, Mr. Eddy Marciano learned of Dona Lucilia in

Forgetting the hazard, Mylena decided to put out the flames with water... but she remembered to invoke the protection of Dona Lucilia



Mylena stands close to a portrait of Dona Lucilia

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the city of Houston in the State of Texas, where he resides, and found in her an “unconditional mother,” in his own words.

In 2021, after receiving the Sacrament of Penance, his confessor gave him a photograph of Dona Lucilia, along with the advice: “She will now be your protective mother.” Since then, he explained that he has acquired “an incredible devotion to and connection with Dona Lucilia.”

At that time, Eddy, born in Venezuela, was trying to get his US residency, but he had come up against an almost insurmountable obstacle, as he recounts: “I didn’t have my Venezuelan birth certificate. That document never existed for me because the place where birth certificates were registered had burned down. My family always had a document with personal identification data that proved this, but to be able to proceed with the residency process, it was mandatory to have the birth certificate.”

With no solution in sight, he decided to appeal to supernatural help: “I entrusted this process to Dona Lucilia, asking her to help me obtain the birth certificate that I never had. And, ‘mi-

raculously,’ for the first time in my life, a birth certificate of mine was found in Maracaibo, Venezuela, thanks to an investigation carried out by a specialist in these matters! I immediately recognized that it was a ‘miracle’ by Dona

After learning of devotion to Dona Lucilia, Eddy got into the habit of turning to her for help in all his needs, and she always answered him

Lucilia, since I had entrusted this case to her.”

However, there were still other difficulties to overcome until the end of the process, one of them of a monetary nature, since Eddy was far from having the necessary amount to complete the residency process.

“Once again, I asked Dona Lucilia for help, because our future in the Unit-

ed States depended on it. Less than two hours had passed when I received the inspiration to call a very close friend of my family, because something told me: ‘Call her, she will help.’ And that’s what I did: I called this person and explained what was happening. At the end of the conversation, she promised: ‘Tell me how much you need, and I will cover all the expenses immediately.’ I began to cry with joy when I realized that I was under the protection of an unconditional mother, who guided us and blessed us with many graces.”

As a final smile from Dona Lucilia on the case, Eddy had his residency approved in less than three months, when the estimation that had been given to him was at least a two-year wait!

Inexplicable movement of a picture

The protection of Dona Lucilia soon became frequent in Eddy’s life, sometimes manifesting itself even before he invoked her, as can be seen in the following incident.

A violinist by profession, he also gives violin lessons. And in the classroom where he teaches, a peculiar episode occurred, which greatly increased his devotion to his protector: “A person came with bad intentions and started asking me certain questions, trying to get me to say things that would be prejudicial to me... At that moment, the picture of Dona Lucilia that I own, framed in glass, began to rock back and forth without anyone touching it, producing a rather loud noise. We were surprised, both the person and I... Then, terrified, she left my classroom and never returned. I continued to stare intently at the picture of Dona Lucilia, and it seemed to me that, with that movement, she wanted to say: ‘Don’t speak, don’t give your opinion, always keep silent.’ It was a great blessing and protection from her!”

Other graces received

Eddy had become accustomed to constantly turning to Dona Lucilia, en-



Eddy Marcano prays at the tomb of his intercessor in Consolation Cemetery in São Paulo; at right, the framed picture of Dona Lucilia that moved inexplicably

Photos: Reproduction

trusting her with a simple plea for any difficulty, from complex health problems to small practical obstacles, such as a cancelled flight. Below, we can appreciate some of these celestial interventions in his life.

On one occasion, he was about to board a flight to South Africa to perform a series of concerts. Upon arriving in the waiting lounge, he noticed that the flight was very full and feared that, as a result, the trip would be very tiring and uncomfortable. He therefore entrusted the flight to Dona Lucilia, simply asking her for a peaceful journey.

With maternal care, she answered his prayer! “Upon boarding the plane, which was packed,” he recounts, “I found three empty seats in the row where I was supposed to sit, and no one occupied them during the entire flight! I immediately recognized it as Dona Lucilia’s work and thanked her right away. The same thing happened on the return trip to the United States.”

Saved from financial trouble

On another occasion, Eddy was to undertake a concert tour in Argentina and Uruguay, and he had secured financial support from a company to purchase the airfare. However, an unforeseen event placed the responsibility for these performances, crucial to his career, in the hands of Dona Lucilia. Eddy recounts:

“Shortly before the trip, I left home for a rehearsal with the orchestra and received a call informing me that the company would no longer provide support for the airfare... I was really taken aback at that moment. I was driving to the rehearsal, but I immediately turned to Dona Lucilia and Our Lady, and asked that they would help



Dona Lucilia in March of 1968

João S. Clá Dias

Dona Lucilia is a truly unconditional mother to all those who seek her help and entrust her with the most varied petitions

me with the flight tickets I needed to go on tour.

“About twenty minutes passed, and when I arrived at the rehearsal location, I received two calls from two different people who wanted to inform me that they had once again secured financial support for the airfare. I immediately recognized, with tears in my eyes, the ‘miracle’ and the manifestation of Dona Lucilia and the Virgin Mary.”

Dona Lucilia saved Eddy from other financial difficulties, one of which occurred during a summer holiday, as he himself tells us: “In June, almost all the students were going on vacation and my finances were practically at rock bottom. Even my wife told me: ‘This month is critical... We need to make adjustments, I’m very worried.’ I went to my office and started praying to Dona Lucilia asking for her help. Not ten minutes passed and I received a message on my cell phone informing me that a deposit of two thousand and five hundred dollars was being made as a donation to support an album I was recording at that moment... My eyes filled with tears of happiness as I recognized Dona Lucilia’s maternal love for her children!

“This is part of the many, many ‘miracles’ that I have received, and that I am sharing with you today, because I recorded them in a notebook that I keep as a memory of all the graces I receive from Dona Lucilia. All I can do is thank her infinitely, as she has always been an unconditional mother to me!”

May these simple manifestations of Dona Lucilia’s effective intercession serve as an encouragement to us, so that we too may find in her protection that same unconditional love, a reflection of the goodness of the Mother of God herself. ✦

¹ CLÁ DIAS, EP, João Scognamiglio. *O dom de sabedoria na mente, vida e obra de [The Gift of Wisdom in the Mind, Life and Work of] Plínio Corrêa de Oliveira*. Città del Vaticano; São Paulo: LEV; Lumen Sapientiae, 2016, v.1, p.130.

Under the Protection



Roberto Salas

1



2

Federico Monzón



3

Jesse Arce

May 13 – Among the celebrations held in honour of Our Lady of Fatima, we highlight the Masses presided over by the Metropolitan Archbishop, Cardinal Adalberto Martínez Flores, at Asuncion Cathedral in Paraguay (photo 2); by the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Francisco Montecillo Padilla, at the Heralds' house in Guatemala City (photo 1); and by Fr. Manuel Rodríguez, EP, at the Church of Our Lady of Fatima in Tocancipá, Colombia (photo 3).



Photos: Luis Rivelino



Alain Patrick

Marian mission – From May 7 to 10, the Pilgrim Statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary travelled through the territory of St. Benedict of Nursia Parish, in Rome. The opening Mass of the Marian mission was presided over by Bishop Aurelio García Macías, Undersecretary of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, and the closing Mass was celebrated by the Most Rev. Andrea Carlevalle, Auxiliary Bishop of Rome.



Hélicia Chata

1



2

Stefano Gavilanes



3

Emilio Páez

Visits to parishes – Our Lady of Fatima was also received by her children in various parishes around the world. Above, visits to the catechism group of St. Cristina Parish in Madrid, Spain (photo 1); to St. Joseph of Calderón Parish in Quito, Ecuador (photo 2); and to St. Andrew Parish in Guayaquil, also in Ecuador (photo 3).



of the Virgin of Fatima



Photos: Nuno Moura

21st National Encounter of the Shrine Apostolate – On April 25th, members of the “Mary, Queen of All Hearts” Shrine Apostolate held their national encounter at the Our Lady of Fatima Shrine in Portugal. The Holy Mass was presided over by Bishop Sérgio Manuel Ribeiro Dinis, Bishop of the Military Ordinariate of Portugal.



Stefano Pigiacelli

Ana Karen

Ricardo Pedraglio

Close to the little ones and the elderly – With the same maternal love, the statue of the Blessed Virgin visited the St. Joseph nursing home, run by the Little Sisters of the Abandoned Elderly in Luque, Paraguay (photo 1); the St. Philip Smaldone Education Centre in Paranoá, in Brazil’s Federal District (photo 2); and the House of Mercy, operated by the Congregation of the Daughters of Our Lady of Mercy, in Lima, Peru (photo 3).



Photos: Gabriel Lopes



Leandro Souza

Caieiras (Brazil) – Fifteen more members of the Heralds of the Gospel completed their master’s degrees in Theology at the Pontifical Bolivarian University of Medellin, Colombia. The graduation ceremony, presided over by Fr. César Ramírez Giraldo, director of the Faculty of Theology, Philosophy and Humanities, took place on May 4 at Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary complex.

Photos: João Lucas Guimarães



Brasilia – On April 10, the choir and orchestra of the Priestly Formation House of the Clerical Society of Apostolic Life Virgo Flos Carmeli contributed their music to the Easter celebrations for military personnel at the Metropolitan Cathedral of Brasilia. The Holy Mass, presided over by the Military Archbishop Marcony Vinícius Ferreira, was attended by several authorities from the Armed Forces, including Lieutenant-Brigadier Ary Soares Mesquita, Secretary of Economy, Finance and Administration of the Air Force.

Photos: João Bovelom



Tatiane de Oliveira

Montes Claros (Brazil) – Pilgrims thronged to participate in the 5th Pilgrimage of Miracles on May 3. The final destination of the fifteen-kilometre walk was the Church of Our Lady of Claríssimos Montes, where Fr. Anderson Fernandes, EP, celebrated Holy Mass.



Photos: Roberto Salas

El Salvador – The Church of Our Lady of Fatima in San Salvador was dedicated on May 13 by Auxiliary Bishop Óscar Álvarez Orellana, by delegation of Metropolitan Archbishop José Luis Escobar Alas. Concelebrating were Bishop Emeritus Luis Morao Andreazza, OFM, of Chalatenango, Monsignor Joseph Salem, Secretary of the Apostolic Nunciature to El Salvador, along with fifty other priests. The President of the Republic, Nayib Armando Bukele Ortez, accompanied by the First Lady and members of the government cabinet, honoured the occasion with his presence.



Timothy Ring

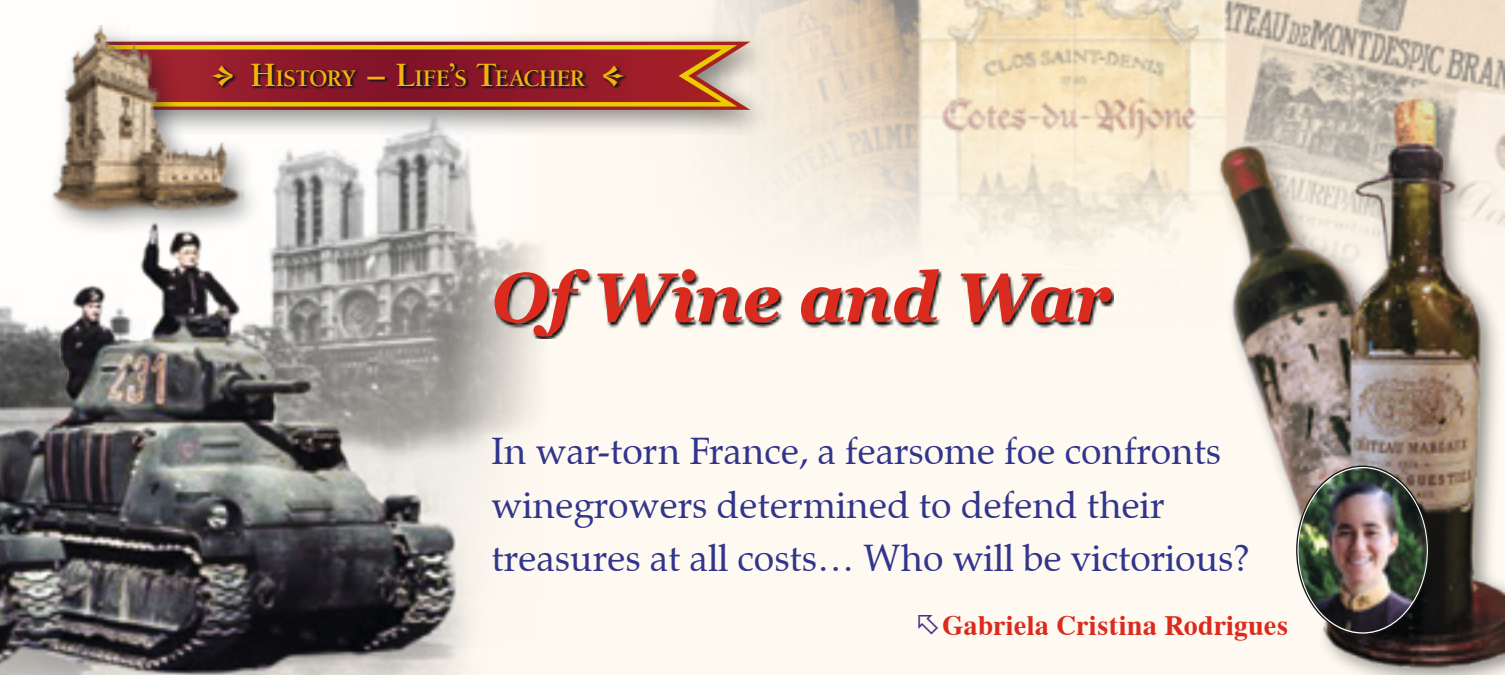
Photos: Tiago Kruger

Italy – The Heralds participated, on May 2, in the procession in honour of Our Lady of Grace, Patroness of the city of Nettuno (photo 1). Then, on May 22, eight Masses were celebrated at the Church of San Benedetto in Piscinula, in the Eternal City, in honour of St. Rita of Cascia (photo 2). Among the celebrants, we highlight the Most Rev. Renato Tarantelli Baccari, Auxiliary Bishop of Rome (photo 3).

Of Wine and War

In war-torn France, a fearsome foe confronts winegrowers determined to defend their treasures at all costs... Who will be victorious?

✦ **Gabriela Cristina Rodrigues**



A famous French company specializing in fine carpets is working on a project with all due patriotic zeal: At Chevalier, after cleaning antique *Aubussons* – a kind of fine rug –, ancient Persian tapestries and other historic items, the extracted dust – often centuries old – is collected in large sacks and distributed to the finest restaurants in Paris. An unusual delivery to establishments known for their elegance... What is the reason for such a bizarre order?¹

The year is 1940. Hitler's military forces are carrying out the occupation of France, as well as several other European countries. In the ongoing operation, many of the châteaux in the region are requisitioned for the use of the German military, who transform them into lodgings, artillery storage space, and surveillance centres.

However, amidst the confiscation of property, destruction of works of art, prohibition of national holidays and celebrations, devaluation of the local currency, and the imposition of labour in German factories by the S.T.O.,² there was something else causing concern among the French population: their wine.

An ancient and highly prized art

Centuries of tradition have made French wines world-renowned gas-

tronomical treasures, true refinements of Christian Civilization. It is said, for example, that it was the austere monks of Cluny, in the 12th century, who taught the peasants how to plant and care for their vineyards. And they discovered the benefit of pruning the vines in an unusual and picturesque way...

One day, in the year 345, St. Martin of Tours went out to inspect some plantations belonging to the monastery in the Loire Valley, leaving his donkey tied next to a row of vines. Hours later, the Saint discovered, to his surprise, that the poor animal had helped itself to several branches as an appetizer... eating some of the vines down to the trunk. The following year, however, the monks found that the vines most mistreated by the grazer were precisely those that became the most vigorous and produced the best grapes. They then began to prune the vineyards every year.

Well, donkeys were not the only ones who appreciated the delightful fruit of the vine. In the Burgundy region, around the 10th century, winegrowers needed to guard their vineyards with weapons at hand because, in times of scarcity, packs of wolves would invade their properties to feed. In this conflict, the factor that saved both vines and winegrowers was the fermentation of the grapes themselves, as this caused the wolves, intoxicated,

to fall asleep in the city streets, making hunting a simple task.

In 1940, new wolves appeared in France. This time, however, they were wearing military uniforms... Taking advantage of the invasion, the Nazis requisitioned the best harvests, which at the time represented not only good taste, but power and sovereignty. And the French wondered: how to protect them?

Covert tactics of war

“Don't say a word to anyone about this!” ordered the winegrower Maurice Drouhin to his family, gathered in the cellar – a veritable labyrinth with 13th-century caves – in order to carry out an unusual task: while he built a wall to hide bottles of the precious Burgundian wine Romanée-Conti, his wife and children set about the cellar seeking spiders, which were then placed on the wall, so their webs would give the impression of antiquity.

Marie-Louise Lanson de Nonancourt had also decided to wall up her treasure. She entrusted it to the Virgin Mary, placing in the false wall a niche with an image of her who begged the Divine Master for the miracle at the wedding at Cana: “Now everything is in her hands,” she told her children, “there is nothing more I can do to protect our future.” She could be sure she had left her possessions in very good hands.

A few decades earlier, during the First World War, the owner of a chateau in Bordeaux, upon learning that the Kaiser's troops were about to arrive, threw his treasure into the depths of a lake. The ruse seemed to have worked until a German soldier decided to take a stroll through the garden the following morning, and contemplating the still surface of the lake, saw it carpeted with floating labels...

In the Second World War, the inhabitants of Bordeaux had already conceived more effective ideas, such as the one adopted by André Foreau, of Vouvray, who buried his prized produce under the beans, tomatoes, and cabbages in his garden, without being discovered by the Germans.

United on a single "front": defending French wine!

"There is strength in unity," goes the saying, proven a thousand times throughout history. And in the "war for wine," it was no different.

Once, a group of German soldiers went to a fine restaurant and, in addition to exquisite dishes, ordered a famous wine. When they saw the waiter arrive with the tray, they assumed it to be a vintage bottle taken from an exclusive section in the cellar. It was covered in a dust that gave it the appearance of a fine aged wine... Collected from carpets and museum pieces, the dust served as a disguise for regular wines, and sparing the precious ones, which the French persevered hidden from unwanted invaders. Returning now to the fact narrated at the beginning of the article, one understands the objective of the unusual upholstery cleaning by-product distributed to famous restaurants...

On the other hand, while the Germanic people were very fond of the fermentation of barley – beer –, in general they had little knowledge of the vast world of wines.

For the wine trade, *Weinführer*³ were appointed, German oenologists qualified to make purchases and sales for

the Third Reich. They were generally chosen from among experienced merchants with contacts and friends in France, as was the case with Heinz Bömers, director of the importer Reidemeister & Ulrichs, appointed to work in the Bordeaux region.

Whether accomplices or not, a peculiar relationship was established between the *Weinführer* and winegrowers: without seemingly neglecting their duties, the Germans facilitated transactions for the French, and in particular were responsible for preventing their most valuable vintages from leaving national territory.

Among Bömers' many wine merchant friends was one named Roger Descas. He faced a dilemma: if he set high prices for wine, he would stimulate inflation and the fury of the German authorities; if, on the contrary, he set low prices, he would seriously compromise the situation of French winegrowers.

He therefore devised a curious stratagem with his *Weinführer* friend.

On the eve of the day they were to appear before the German Economic Service, they agreed on *their* prices. But the following morning, before the German authorities, both made a speech presenting completely altered prices. It was then that a theatrical performance worthy of *the Grand Opéra* of Paris began: Bömers accused Descas of extorting him, Descas blamed Bömers of the same.

The discussion became heated, but finally "reason" triumphed and both reached a sensible settlement: the prices would be those they had secretly agreed upon the day before.

On another occasion, suspecting that Field Marshal Göring was about to requisition great vintages of Bordeaux, Bömers ordered some employees to place labels of the iconic Château Mouton-Rothschild on bottles of ordinary wines, an order that was promptly obeyed.

Wine becomes an ally in war

There were many occasions when, perhaps "grateful" for the loyal attachment of which it was the object, wine collaborated in the struggles and liberation of its makers.

It was common, for example, to see the winegrower Jean Monmousseaux transporting barrels from one side of the demarcation line⁴ to the other. As he lived nearby, the Germans were used to seeing him with his barrels. However, these had a greater use than just containing wine: they hid people... For many Resistance leaders, the containers served as a first-rate transportation! Jean used this stratagem for two years and never aroused any suspicion.

Champagne, the sublime "brother" of wine, also provided relevant military information to the Allies: the Reich had the custom of sending shipments of sparkling wine to its soldiers on the front. So it was that the main champagne houses informed French officers

There were many occasions when, as if in "gratitude", the wine collaborated in the struggles and liberation of its makers

On this and the previous page, scenes of the Nazi occupation in France; above, bottles and labels of French wines



about the destinations of these shipments, thus revealing the exact position of enemy troops.

On one such occasion, the Nazis requested that a huge quantity of bottles be specially corked and packaged for shipment to a “very hot country.” This served as a clue for the Allies to discover that Field Marshal Rommel⁵ was about to launch a major offensive in Egypt.

A festival in confinement

Despite it all, inevitably some French people were imprisoned during the war. Among them were winegrowers like Gaston Huet, from Vouvray.

To assuage their nostalgia for their vineyards and families, the prisoners passed the time exchanging knowledge about viticulture. It was in one of these conversations that Gaston Huet had an idea: “Let’s have a wine banquet!” A wonderful proposal, but how to make it a reality?

Huet had learned that, in a nearby prisoner-of-war camp, fermented beverages were circulating among the guards, which was expressly forbidden.

A few days later, he blackmailed the German camp commander, asking for wine in exchange for his silence. The nervous and reluctant officer eventually agreed.

The French viticulturists acted with shrewdness to protect their wines. And we, how do we act to defend God?

Winegrowers of Château Haut-Marbuzet - Bordeaux (France)

While awaiting the seven hundred bottles that would allow each prisoner to have a glass of wine, Huet and his companions took care in the preparation of a great feast: a committee composed of representatives from each of the wine regions was assembled.

Artists volunteered to make posters and maps; a theatre group proposed staging skits about wine, complete with improvised sets and costumes; the priest who directed the camp’s choir began music rehearsals; carpenters built a wine press – later used to cover the entrance to a tunnel for a surprise escape.

The date of the festival was set for January 24, 1943, feast of St. Vincent, the patron saint of French winemakers. Preceded by several presentations and speeches, the moment eagerly awaited by all arrived: the tasting. Each bottle would be divided among seven men, who could help themselves to their favourite wine.

Recalling all the work he had done organizing the event, Huet would comment years later: “It saved our sanity. I don’t know what we would have done without that festival. It gave us something to hold on to. It gave us a reason to get up in the morning, to face each day.”

Shrewdness worthy of imitation

It would be impossible to summarize in these lines all the feats related to the protection of French wine during the Second World War... Nevertheless, we can draw a lesson from the exploits recounted here: in the many battles that arise throughout our lives, we must know how to be simple as doves and cunning as serpents (cf. Mt 10:16).

The intention here is not to defend the righteousness of the actions of the French winegrowers; but rather to uphold their shrewdness as worthy of imitation.

Shrewdness is a virtue attached to prudence, which allows for an easy and quick conjecture regarding the means to be undertaken in a given action.⁶ Indeed, they acted with remarkable circumspection in protecting a material patrimony.

And we, Catholics of the 21st century, when it comes to defending the Holy Church, divine patrimony and light of the nations, how do we proceed?

Do we utilize all our intelligence and shrewdness to confound the enemies of Christ and make innocence triumph? Or do we allow ourselves to be foolishly dragged into the snares of the adversary, permitting virtue to be crushed and corrupted?

Under the maternal protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, let us not permit the children of darkness to be more cunning than the children of light (cf. Lk 16:8); rather, may wisdom truly dwell with prudence (cf. Prv 8:12). ✚

¹ The historical information and facts narrated in this article were taken from the work: KLADSTRUP, Don; KLADSTRUP, Petie. *Vinho & Guerra*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 2002.

² Initials for the *Service du Travail Obligatoire*: a forced labour program implemented by the Vichy government in 1942 to meet Germany’s manual labour requirements.

³ In German, literally: wine guide.

⁴ From the fall of France in May 1940, until November 1942, the demarcation line was the division established by the Armistice of June 22, 1940, to separate the German-occupied zone – northern and western France – from the free zone to the south.

⁵ German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. For his military exploits in North Africa, he became known as the *Desert Fox*.

⁶ Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Theologiae*. II-II, q.49, a.4.



...how tabernacles came about?

Such is the Church's love for Jesus Christ that, after the Bridegroom ascended to Heaven, she was not content to encounter Him again only during Holy Mass, but wished to adore Him every day, wherever it was celebrated. Tabernacles arose in order to satisfy this desire. The God whom the heavens could not contain would also dwell on earth.

Alongside this primary reason, there were other serious motives – among them, the groans of the agonizing. The Council of Nicaea (325) prescribed that the dying should not be deprived of the Eucharistic viaticum. But how could this spiritual comfort be brought to them if the consecrated Hosts were not reserved?

A more concrete answer to this question can be found in the Apostolic Constitutions. In them, deacons were instructed to deposit the holy particles in what the Latins called a *secretarium*

or *sacrarium* – hence the term *sacrament house* or *tabernacle* – which was locked and guarded by sacred ministers.

This custom continued until the 9th century. Variations then arose regarding the style and location of the tabernacle. In certain temples, it was placed behind the altar, with the name of propitiatory; in other churches, it was the sacristy that had the honour of housing the King of Heaven. Especially in the great Gothic or Renaissance cathedrals, tabernacles were adorned with colourful murals and statuary. From the 16th century onwards, it became visible on high altars. And there is also the custom of keeping it in a side chapel.

The Divine Master's love for His disciples is so unfathomable that He desires to be present not only in the Holy Mass or in the tabernacles of the whole world, but also in the tabernacles of the souls of the faithful. ✦



João Paulo Rodrigues

Tabernacle in the Oratory of the Heralds of the Gospel in Ponta Grossa (Brazil)

...who were the first Westerners to enter the Forbidden City?

China: a kingdom of dreams, surrounded by walls so imposing that they remained practically insurmountable until the end of the 16th century. However, there is no place on earth, however inhospitable, where the sweet timbre of Christ's voice cannot resound.

For the then-called Middle Kingdom, the Word of God used an instrument to manifest Himself: Fr. Matteo Ricci, a missionary of the Society of Jesus.

His desire was to convert the entire nation, but to do so he needed to reach the head. Emperor Wanli lived in the Forbidden City, the residence of the "son of heaven." Combining the cunning of the serpent with the innocence

of the dove, the Jesuit priest offered the monarch sixteen gifts, among them a



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Fr. Matteo Ricci -
Church of the Gesù, Rome

clavichord, so that music could penetrate where words could not reach; a clock, to arouse curiosity; and a painting of Our Lord, so that the "son of heaven" might know the Son of God.

The gifts caused great astonishment at court. And, to satisfy the demands of the Orientals, missionaries were called to the Forbidden City, where the first Westerners finally entered in 1601. The Jesuits, responding to the scientific and musical aspirations of the Chinese, simultaneously taught them the superior wisdom of the Faith by echoing the Gospel precept: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). And there are no walls or prohibitions that can thwart this command... ✦

Silence, an Inexhaustible Source of Harmony

By appreciating outer silence, we will obtain inner silence. And in the perfect harmony born from both, we will be able to hear the Eternal Word.



✦ Santiago Rodríguez

Silence... stillness... Let us pause for a moment and imagine ourselves in a solitary place where our senses can be better penetrated by the fullness of calm. Be it on the peak of a towering mountain, on the edge of a misty cliff battered by the waves of the sea, in the luminosity of a desert, or in the delicacy of a pleasant woods. Let us listen attentively to the whisper of the leaves moved by the wind, the murmur of a crystalline stream, and the symphonies of birds at dawn. Let us imagine, with attentive ears, the rain falling and running down the stones. And, raising our minds with gratitude to the Creator of so many wonders, we will be predisposed to hear Him.

I now invite you to enter an ancient cloister, where the footsteps of a monk slowly echo in the arched passageway until they merge into the stone. A short time later, amidst the chanting of the monks, we hear the distant sil-

very chiming of a bell announcing the celebration of the sacred mysteries in a secluded church located at the end of a snow-covered valley, where the praying people are already gathered.

Living moments like these – free from the hubbub of urban centres, the exhausting monotony of machines, the strident din of engines, and the endless noise pollution generated by our ailing society – has become a luxury that, regrettably, few have the chance to experience.

For the bodily ears, there is no such thing as absolute silence. Even in a place completely isolated from external vibrations, this stupendous organ forged by God to make hearing possible would reveal the smallest internal movements of our body, including our heartbeats.

And so... what do we mean when we speak of silence?

One way to define it could be the pleasant perception, by the ear, of an

ordered, moderate, and balanced environment, in which all sound comes from sources with rhythms and harmonies in consonance with human nature, without discordant stridency. For this reason, the most exotic trill of a canary will not be felt as an aggression, but rather as a perfect complement; sometimes, even the imposing voices of the wind and the sea will unite to help us appreciate the silence.

The Gospel tells us that Jesus went to the mountains to pray alone (cf. Mt 14:23), for thus said “the Holy One of Israel, ‘In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength’” (Is 30:15).

The prophet Elijah also learned that it is not in the storm, nor in the fire and earthquake, that God reveals Himself to His servants, but rather in the whisper of a silent breeze (cf. 1 Kgs 19:11-13), because, as Ecclesiastes points out, “The words of the wise are heard in si-



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lence” (9:17 Vulg.). In peace, understood as the tranquillity of order, man becomes capable of acquiring inner silence, which consists in the mastery of the passions.

St. Benedict,¹ the father of monastic life in the West, also taught to value quietude as a forger of humility, stating that there are occasions when even kind words should be set aside for the sake of silence, until we learn, through struggle, the refined art of saying nothing that is not superior to it.

The friend who never betrays – according to the beautiful expression of Eastern wisdom – is not the nihilistic, egocentric, and sterile silence that some seek to achieve. Because true silence is fruitful and more musical than any melody; countless wonders have sprung from its depths: preachers, apostles, architects, warriors, poets...

Perhaps its most eloquent version is the chant of the Holy Church, that is,

Gregorian chant, “harmonious silence” par excellence, which, born from the silence of contemplation, engenders an even greater silence. By analysing its simple and sublime melismas, emanating from souls that have attained inner silence, one will understand what is stated here.

Although it is difficult to escape the cacophony engulfing the vast majority of humanity, let us follow the counsel of Psalm 37 and trust in the Lord, keeping silent (cf. Ps 38:14-16). From the peace we obtain in a well-lived interior life, harmonies will be born capable of silencing evil, casting it into the

dark prison that the Just Judge destines for it. Let us seek to distance ourselves from the noisy movement of diabolical and human voices that, like a turbid and violent river, threaten to sweep us away; and let us drink from the Absolute Silence, which is the Eternal Word. An ocean of quietude, profound wisdom, countless treasures, joy, and infinite peace. “For God alone my soul waits in silence; from Him comes my salvation” (Ps 62:1). ✠

¹ Cf. RULE OF ST. BENEDICT, c.VI.

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Madonna and Child with musical Angels,
by Gherardo Starnina - Getty Center,
Los Angeles (California)



Come to Me and I will give you peace

My child, I am the Mother of Mercy, with a Heart always full of compassion; I am the mysterious ladder of sinners, I am the hope and pardon of the culpable, I am the consolation of afflicted souls, I am the joy and the delight of the blessed. Come to Me, all you who love Me, come and you shall be filled with my

consolations. Come, for I have pity on those who invoke Me, come to Me! Come all, both just and sinners, come; I will plead for you before God the Father, I will pray also to the Eternal Son, who is my own Son, that He may grant His pardon to all through the Holy Spirit.

Thomas à Kempis