

Readings for the Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Ave Maria Catholic Church – Extraordinary Form

1 Cor 1:4-8

Brethren, I give thanks to my God always on your account for the grace of God bestowed on you in Christ Jesus, that in him you were enriched in every way, with all discourse and all knowledge, as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will keep you firm to the end, irreproachable on the day of our Lord Jesus [Christ].

Matthew 9: 1-8

At that time, Jesus entered a boat, made the crossing, and came into his own town. And there people brought to him a paralytic lying on a stretcher. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Courage, child, your sins are forgiven.” At that, some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.” Jesus knew what they were thinking, and said, “Why do you harbor evil thoughts? Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he then said to the paralytic, “Rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home.” He rose and went home. When the crowds saw this, they were struck with awe and glorified God who had given such authority to men.

Good Friends

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost – Matthew 9: 1-8

Ave Maria Catholic Church, October 9, 2022 – Fr. David M. Vidal

The Gospel of St. Matthew tells us that “people brought to Jesus a paralytic lying on a stretcher.” St. Mark and St. Luke give us more details since they also stated that four men were carrying the paralytic on a stretcher. And since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they opened the roof above Jesus and lowered their friend down to place him next to Christ.

Those friends were determined. They wanted Jesus to touch their needy friend. We can imagine their frustration when they saw the crowd and the door that was blocked. However, that obstacle didn’t deter them; it didn’t discourage them. Many would have given up. They would have said, ‘maybe next time.’ But they didn’t give up, and they didn’t say, “next time.” They were on a mission: that was the healing of their friend. Then they went on the roof and started breaking through it.

Can you imagine the surprise of the people looking at those men tearing down the roof and lowering the stretcher with their friend to lay him right next to Jesus? These were dedicated and good friends, but they were also friends with great faith! Faith in Christ!

And Jesus rewarded them. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Courage, child, your sins are forgiven.” The paralytic didn’t say a word. He didn’t plea for his cause. It was the faith of those friends lowering the paralytic to Jesus’s feet that was rewarded with the miracle.

How important it is to have good friends!

It is not surprising that the Book of Sirach says: *“Faithful friends are a sturdy shelter; whoever finds one finds a treasure. Faithful friends are beyond price; no amount can balance their worth. Faithful friends are life-saving medicine; those who fear God will find them. Those who fear the Lord enjoy stable friendship, for as they are, so will their neighbors be,”* (Sirach 6: 14-17).

Yes, “As they are, so will their neighbors be.” Such are good friends who will influence those who are around them to be good!

What is the love of friendship? To understand the love of friendship, we need to make some distinctions.

For Aristotle (and later for Thomas Aquinas), there are three kinds of relationships based on three kinds of love that unite people.

First, in a **relationship of utility**, love is based on the benefit or use the friends derive from the relationship. Each person gets something out of the friendship to their advantage, and the mutual benefit of the relationship unites the two people. Many work-related friendships fall under this category. This is friendship in business. To do business, you need to have friends, which means that you are willing to give something in exchange for something else. Perhaps there is love, but not without interest. In a business friendship, one gives to receive something in return, and one only gives if there is a return.

Second, in a **relationship of pleasure**, the basis of love is the pleasure one gets from the other. One sees the friend as a cause of some pleasure for himself. This friendship is primarily about “great feelings.” To be with the other is “much fun” or, in other words, “it causes great pleasure.” These are friends of the “good times.”

Aristotle said that while useful and pleasant relationships of love are basic forms of love, they do not represent love in the most profound sense. Useful and pleasant relationships that are founded on the love of benefits and pleasures are very fragile.

We must look for the **highest, truest, and most complete type of relationship** that is founded on a **relationship of friendship**.

Saint John Paul II (in *Love and Responsibility*) describes friendship in this way: *“Friendship consists in a full commitment of the will to another person with a view to that person's good.”*

A friend desires the good of the person he loves and works for his good. And that work is done with full commitment. Sometimes, that commitment leads to sacrifices and even greater kinds of sacrifices. Our Lord tells us: *“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends,”* (John 15: 13).

Then a friend is someone who desires the good of the other. And what is the good of the other person?

Since our ultimate good as human beings consists in knowing and loving God, true friendship starts from there. True friends will lead us to God. True friends will not be obstacles in our relationship with God; on the contrary, their company will only be a reason of encouragement for a stronger union of love with God.

Now, it is very significant that when Jesus saw the faith of those good friends from today's gospel, his first action was to forgive the sins of the paralytic: *“Your sins are forgiven.”* That is surprising! That man was a paralytic; why did he not immediately say: *“Rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home?”*

The healing of that man's soul was his greatest need. And Jesus shows the greatest act of friendship. He rewarded the faith of those good friends with the greatest gift, which is God's pardon and peace. It is only afterwards that Jesus restores the man's physical health.

How important it is to have good friends! Friends that will lead us closer to Jesus! How important it is to be good friends of others, to care for others, and sacrifice ourselves for the good of others. As the Book of Sirach teaches us: *Faithful friends are life-saving medicine; those who fear God will find them.*

We need good friends, and we need to be good friends of others. Let us start by being good friends of Jesus; then, we will learn to carry one another's stretchers and bring others closer to Christ. In doing so, we too will receive Jesus's blessing. Amen