 Reading time: 2 min.

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7. Who finds a friend…?

Dear young people,
the gift and responsibility of authentic, Christian friendship has characterised my entire existence. Probably so intensely that it has become one of the most concrete sources for discovering and rediscovering the beauty of God's love, especially in dark and delicate moments.
This very deep desire to love my loved ones in God's way and to dispassionately love my friends because of the love I received from the good Jesus, led me to express a kind of promise: 'In my heart, the desire to keep all my friendships will always remain very ardent'.
I think that friendship is not just complicity, light-hearted jokes, confidences that perhaps exclude others with malice, petty vendettas… but authentic education to accept the divine-human love that Jesus Christ had for us.
Within my family, the joy of friendship consisted in receiving and giving simple and genuine love. In Paris, I had genuine friends, study colleagues who helped me by passing me the notes of the theology courses that I could not attend and suggesting the best courses to take. At Padua, discernment in friendship for me meant distinguishing real friends from those who sought only a carefree approach on my part. The latter also played some heavy jokes on me, but I was always able to respond in kind, with decision and rectitude of spirit.
When I became a priest, I was offered the opportunity of a true friendship with Senator Favre. The difference in age and responsibility was very great: but the friendly relationship was always serene and respectful, and from the letters we exchanged, a fraternal affection of a quality that is difficult to achieve.
As a bishop, in 1604, I met Madame Francesca de Chantal, who later consecrated herself and founded the congregation of the Visitation Sisters with me. I would describe the friendship between us as "whiter than snow and purer than the sun", first as spiritual direction conducted from the heart and then as an exchange of gifts in the Spirit. The predominant theme of what had been a rich exchange of letters and conversations was the guidance towards the path of total trust in God: from friendship between human persons enlightened by the Spirit to the heart of the relationship with Jesus Christ, to whom we can abandon ourselves with total trust, in light and in storm, in joy and in darkest days.

Office for Vocational Animation

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