

October 10: Befriending Others: A Mission Paradigm

Today's Gospel speaks of friendship, a theme relevant to our celebration of the special "mission month" proclaimed by Pope Francis. The Gospels are filled with numerous examples of Jesus approaching others in friendship. Saint Luke shows Jesus compassionately reaching out to lepers, paralytics, sinners, tax collectors, the centurion, widows, demoniacs, epileptics; Luke's list is extensive. Jesus himself is the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37) and the compassionate father (Lk 15:11-32). At the Last Supper Jesus says: "One can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you" (Jn 15:13-14).

The eminent Catholic scripture scholar Rudolph Schnackenburg has written a moving book with the title *The Friend We Have in Jesus*. His insights are truly profound: "Friendship is really a comprehensive expression for our relationship with him [Jesus].... Our friend Jesus calls to us: 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest'.... That is the voice of the friend who understands us and reveals his heart to us.... Each person must conclude for himself or herself that Jesus is the friend—indeed the personal friend—of every human being."

In his beautiful *Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)*, Francis notes: "The Joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus" (1). "I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed encounter with Jesus Christ.... I ask all of you to do this unflinchingly each day" (3). Francis continues: "this encounter—or renewed encounter—with God's love ... blossoms into an *enriching friendship*.... Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization" (8). For Pope Francis—and each of us: "Mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people" (268).