

“Love is to will the good of another” St. Thomas Aquinas

A Presentation on authentic Friendship

On Being People of Communion made One in the Eucharist: Source & Summit of Christian Life

God revealed the plan to share the communion of Trinitarian life with persons created in his image. Indeed, it is for the sake of this Trinitarian communion that human persons are created in the divine image. It is precisely this radical likeness to the triune God that is the basis for the possibility of the communion of creaturely beings with the uncreated persons of the Blessed Trinity.

“So, every individual human being as well as the whole human community are created in the image of God. In its original unity – of which Adam is the symbol – the human race is made in the image of the divine Trinity. Willed by God, it makes its way through the vicissitudes of human history towards a perfect communion, also willed by God, but not yet fully realized. In this sense, human beings share the solidarity of a unity that both already exists and is still to be attained.” Pgh 43 ITC Communion and stewardship: Human persons created in the image of God

Created in the image of God, human beings are by nature bodily and spiritual, men and women made for one another, persons oriented towards communion with God and with one another, wounded by sin and in need of salvation, and destined to be conformed to Christ, the perfect image of the Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

“Spiritually and physically united to the incarnate and glorified Word, especially in the sacrament of the Eucharist, man arrives at his destination: the resurrection of his own body and the eternal glory in which he participates as a complete human person, body, and soul, in the Trinitarian communion shared by all the blessed in the company of heaven.” Pgh 31 ITC Communion and stewardship: Human persons created in the image of God

For many youth and young adults who actively participated in intentional communities such as youth groups and college ministries, what endures beyond the events, emotional and spiritual ‘highs’, and accolades is friendship in its truest form. Adults discover this same and unique experience of relationship in parish small groups, retreats, bible study groups and ministries. Although not all have the ideal experience, the many do discover that true friends share in each other’s joys and support one another through challenging times; they help each other grow in emotional and intellectual maturity, faith, virtue, knowledge of self and understanding of ‘the other’. They help each other to become that which they were made to be, men and women of communion.

This “personal identity that is at once an orientation to the other is founded essentially on the Trinity of divine Persons. God is not a solitary being, but a communion of three Persons... no person is as such alone in the universe but is always constituted with others and is summoned to form a community with them.” Pgh 41 ITC Communion and stewardship: Human persons created in the image of God

What distinguishes this Christian experience from others is that the Christian experience is rooted in affirmation of the nature of the human person, as created by God in the image and likeness of God. It therefore holds up the choice to love as charity, which is virtue, and aims for authentic self-gift, to love by willing the good of the other. If a so-called Christian intentional community is not so rooted, it becomes merely another social grouping of like-minded folks unattached to universal truth and subject to change relative to the thoughts, opinions and feelings of the group or the group’s leaders. Conversely, any non-religious group in which it is possible for the participants to experience something akin to the authentic Christian experience, do so because of adherence to fundamental truths of the nature of the human person and found most fully revealed in Christianity.

Our word “friend” etymologically rises from a Proto-Indo-European word meaning “to love”. Pope St. John Paul II wrote in his book *Love and Responsibility*, echoing St. Thomas Aquinas: “Friendship, consists in a full commitment of the will to another person with a view to that person’s good.” So it is that at the heart of being a person of communion is to be a person in relationship with other persons. He or she is one who loves, who chooses to will the good of the other.

This is my commandment: love one another as I love you.ⁱ 13 No one has greater love than this,^j to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends,^{*} because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father.^k 16 It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you.^l 17 This I command you: love one another.^m John 15:12-17*

How does friendship, love and communion come together in the most unique and intimate form, Eucharistic communion? St. Thomas Aquinas wrote, “It is the law of friendship that friends should live together. . . Christ has not left us without his bodily presence in this our pilgrimage, but he joins us to himself in this sacrament in the reality of his body and blood” *Summa Theologiae*, III q. 75, a. 1. The pinnacle of this love for another is to be found in the person of Christ, his words, his actions, his choices, and his sacrificial gift of self without reserve – making himself manifest among us in the Eucharist and offering us a tangible communion with God through Christ by which we most fully are able to remain in Him as He remains in us. Jesus said, “My flesh is true food”, *John 6:55* “Whoever eats my flesh ... remains in me and I in him”. *John 6:56* As Jesus receives us and we receive him in a communion of love, he continues the work of our transformation into the image of God and likeness to himself. A person of communion is therefore, one who has embraced their authentic being and essence as image of God and who lives their likeness to the divine as image of Christ. Truly we are to ‘become what we touch, in the Eucharist’.

Eucharistic communion also confirms the Church in her unity as the body of Christ. Saint Paul refers to this unifying power of participation in the banquet of the Eucharist when he writes to the Corinthians: “The bread which we break, is it not a communion in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread”. 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 Saint John Chrysostom’s commentary on these words is profound and perceptive: “For what is the bread? It is the body of Christ. And what do those who receive it become? The Body of Christ – not many bodies but one body. For as bread is completely one, though made of up many grains of wheat, and these, albeit unseen, remain nonetheless present, in such a way that their difference is not apparent since they have been made a perfect whole, so too are we mutually joined to one another and together united with Christ”. The argument is compelling: our union with Christ, which is a gift and grace for each of us, makes it possible for us, in him, to share in the unity of his body which is the Church. The Eucharist reinforces the incorporation into Christ which took place in Baptism through the gift of the Spirit. Corinthians 12:13, 27, Ecclesia de Eucharistia #23

St Augustine believed with the Church and defended transubstantiation, that the visible bread and wine on the altar become the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity – the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. He taught that what we receive in Communion is the same Body of Christ that hung on the Cross, from which we are fed. “Recognize in the bread what hung on the cross, and in the cup what flowed from his side.” *Sermon to Neophytes* He also believed that when the Eucharist is devoutly received, we become that Body, members of that Mystical Body of Christ. It is therefore with confidence that he taught “if we receive the Eucharist worthily, we become what we receive” *And in receiving Christ, we become one body in him, and through him, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Through receiving the Eucharist, we enter into a unique and personal relationship with the Trinity and with one another, the Body of Christ. We become what we eat.* *Sermon 227*

In the first paragraph of the encyclical letter 'Ecclesia de Eucharistia, Pope St. John Paul II wrote that *"The Church draws her life from the Eucharist... in the Holy Eucharist... she rejoices in this presence with unique intensity. Ever since Pentecost, when the Church, the People of the New Covenant, began her pilgrim journey towards her heavenly homeland, the Divine Sacrament has continued to mark the passing of her days, filling them with confident hope."*

The Church is the sacrament of salvation and of the kingdom of God: catholic, in bringing together man of every race and culture; one, in being the vanguard of the unity of the human community willed by God; holy, sanctified herself by the power of the Holy Spirit, and sanctifying all men through the Sacraments; and, apostolic, in continuing the mission of the men chosen by Christ to accomplish progressively the divinely willed unity of the human race and the consummation of creation and redemption. Pgh43 ITC Communion and stewardship: Human persons created in the image of God

Intentional Communities of Friendship

What is the Church if not the ideal intentional community brought together in friendship, imperfect individuals drawn into the divine life of communion through baptism, to made holy as members of His body, continuously made so in the Eucharistic communion.

"The gift of Christ and his Spirit which we receive in Eucharistic communion superabundantly fulfils the yearning for fraternal unity deeply rooted in the human heart; at the same time it elevates the experience of fraternity already present in our common sharing at the same Eucharistic table to a degree which far surpasses that of the simple human experience of sharing a meal. Through her communion with the body of Christ the Church comes to be ever more profoundly "in Christ in the nature of a sacrament, that is, a sign and instrument of intimate unity with God and of the unity of the whole human race". Ecclesia de Eucharistia #24

But our lives are lived between this 'already – not yet' of who we are in this temporal world, so what of this love to be experienced between and among us here and now, and how is this authentic bond of friendship then formed? Remember, the simplest way to state how St. Thomas Aquinas defines this love, is that it is "the choice to will the good of the other." As quoted below, paragraph #24 of the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes*, helps us to understand the words of St. Thomas and does so in way that many of us will first recognize as taught in detail by Pope St. John Paul II, more than we might remember it as part of the conciliar documents:

God, Who has fatherly concern for everyone, has willed that all men should constitute one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood. For having been created in the image of God, Who "from one man has created the whole human race and made them live all over the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26), all men are called to one and the same goal, namely God Himself.

For this reason, love for God and neighbor is the first and greatest commandment. Sacred Scripture, however, teaches us that the love of God cannot be separated from love of neighbor: "If there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.... Love therefore is the fulfillment of the Law" (Rom. 13:9-10; cf. 1 John 4:20). To men growing daily more dependent on one another, and to a world becoming more unified every day, this truth proves to be of paramount importance.

Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when He prayed to the Father, "that all may be one. . . as we are one" (John 17:21-22) opened up vistas closed to human reason, for He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God's sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself. (2)

Pope St John Paul II knew the importance of friendship as a young man. As a young priest, Fr Wojtyla formed youth groups of young men and women. They went hiking, attended retreats, and put on plays, despite being oppressed first by the Germans in WWII and subsequently by the Russians. In these groups, the youth found freedom through authentic friendship which affirmed law of nature within them which impels a person toward communion. They were able to cultivate human flourishing during violent turmoil, helping one another



respond to the universal call to holiness as they each recognized in the other an unrepeatable subject, embracing their own individuality and becoming increasingly self-possessed, free then to give the gift of themselves to another.

In fact, Fr Wojtyla reflected what Jesus Himself did during His earthly mission. Jesus gathered an intentional community of persons to himself, and among them deep friendships were born, as they learned together, from Jesus, what it meant to be a human person, created in the image and likeness of God, and how therefore to love God, themselves, and their

neighbor as themselves. These friends of Christ were first and foremost gathered by Christ and drawn to communion with Christ in the celebration of the Mass and reception of the Eucharist. They were transformed, became empowered to engage in the ministry of the mission, to share in Christ's life work of sharing and teaching about the Gospel truth that saves, that makes one no longer a slave to sin but rather one who is free, authentically free.

Image of God, Image of Christ

Unlike any other creation of God, we desire to know ourselves. Although we can seek to come to this knowledge in myriad ways, such as Adam sought to recognize himself in the animals, we cannot be truly satisfied in our search until we recognize ourselves in Christ just as Adam finally recognized himself in Eve. There can only be one who reveals who we are because there has only, since the end of our original innocence, been one who is perfectly what we are. The mystery of man is only made clear to us in the mystery Christ, in whom perfect humanity is revealed and through whom we are destined to be the sons and daughters of God, *"to be conformed to the image of his Son, who is the firstborn of many brothers"*. Romans. 8:29

Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear. It is not surprising, then, that in Him all the aforementioned truths find their root and attain their crown. [Gaudium et Spes](#), 22

He Who is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15),(21) is Himself the perfect man. To the sons of Adam He restores the divine likeness which had been disfigured from the first sin onward. Since human nature as He assumed it was not annulled, by that very fact it has been raised up to a divine dignity in our respect too. For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin. [Gaudium et Spes](#), 22

As an innocent lamb He merited for us life by the free shedding of His own blood. In Him God reconciled us to Himself and among ourselves; from bondage to the devil and sin He delivered us, so that each one of us can say with the Apostle: The Son of God "loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20). By suffering for us He not only provided us with an example for our imitation, He blazed a trail, and if we follow it, life and death are made holy and take on a new meaning. [Gaudium et Spes](#), 22

The Christian man, conformed to the likeness of that Son Who is the firstborn of many brothers, received "the first-fruits of the Spirit" ^{Romans 8:23} by which he becomes capable of discharging the new law of love. Through this Spirit, who is "the pledge of our inheritance", ^{Ephesians. 1:14} the whole man is renewed from within, even to the achievement of "the redemption of the body": ^{Romans 8:23} "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the death dwells in you, then he who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will also bring to life your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who dwells in you". ^{Romans 8:11} Pressing upon the Christian to be sure, are the need and the duty to battle against evil through manifold tribulations and even to suffer death. But, linked with the paschal mystery and patterned on the dying Christ, he will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength which comes from hope. Gaudium et Spes, 22

All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery. Gaudium et Spes, 22

Such is the mystery of man, and it is a great one, as seen by believers in the light of Christian revelation. Through Christ and in Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful. Apart from His Gospel, they overwhelm us. Christ has risen, destroying death by His death; He has lavished life upon us so that, as sons in the Son, we can cry out in the Spirit; Abba, Father. Gaudium et Spes, 22

It must clear at this point that each human person is created by the love of God and for love of God. Each is created within community and for communion. We are as God is, individual and relational persons who know and who love. Yet, it is also clear from lived experience, Scripture and teachings of the Church that each of us is also born in that original sin and needs be reborn into perfection. Therefore, God sent his only Son incarnate of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin so that, *"Through him, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross". ^{Colossians 1:20}* Our rebirth through baptism draws us up into the communion for which we are destined, the divine union, and lived in this world as one, each of us members of the mystical body of Christ, the Church. As is articulated well in paragraphs 54 & 55 of the International Theological Commission document on 'Communion and Stewardship';

"between the origins of man and his absolute future lies the present existential situation of humans, during which time Christ - in his incarnation, death, and resurrection - restores the image of God in man to its proper form. While the Holy Spirit will accomplish the ultimate configuration of human persons to Christ in the resurrection of the dead, human beings already participate in this eschatological likeness to Christ here below, during time and history through all the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, to transfigure and divinize human beings. The Holy Spirit also works mysteriously in all human beings of good will, in societies and in the cosmos. In this way, man's everyday existence is defined as an endeavor to be conformed ever more fully to the image of Christ and to dedicate his life to the struggle to bring about the final victory of Christ in the world."

Each of us must understand our communal nature, our 'I – thou' ness. We can live this social element of our being in many ways, but if we are to attain our 'summa bonum', we will have to live in communion as God intended. At the heart of this social character is the dignity and value of the human person.

Created in the image of God to share in the communion of Trinitarian life, human beings are persons who are so constituted as to be able freely to embrace this communion. Freedom is the divine gift that enables human persons to choose the communion which the triune God offers to them as their ultimate good. But with freedom comes the possibility of the failure of freedom. Instead of embracing the ultimate good of participation in the divine life, human persons can and do turn away from it to enjoy transitory or even only imaginary goods. Sin is precisely this failure of freedom, this turning away from the divine invitation to communion. ^{Pgh 44 ITC Communion and stewardship: Human persons created in the image of God}