

Msgr. Dennis Sheehan
Homily Given on May 17, 2009
Sixth Sunday of Easter
Liturgical Year B

A couple married many years were sitting by the fire. He had an uncharacteristic romantic thought. He said to her, "After all these years, I've found you tried and true!" She was quite hard of hearing. "What's that?" "After all these years," he repeated, "I've found you tried and true." "Yes," she said, "after all these years, I'm tired of you too!"

An English teacher asked a class to write colorful descriptions of what it meant to have a friend. Listen to a few. "A friend is a pair of open arms in a room full of armless people." "A friend is rock 'n' roll in the middle of a classical concert." "A friend is a mug of hot coffee on a cold morning." "A friend is a stiff drink when you've just had a terrible shock." (I want to talk to that kid's parents!)

Friendship is a great thing but surprisingly rare. A survey a few years ago found that 60% of American men over 30 couldn't name a close friend. (Wives were apparently excluded). Women fared better, but most of their friendships were functional – parenting, school, clubs, volunteer groups, churches.

Jesus calls his followers "friends" today. They are not slaves. They are not students. They are friends. Friendship is a key reality in being related to Jesus. Before they were "Christians", they were friends of Jesus – and one another. Before they were church, they were friends of Jesus – and one another. Jesus said it himself: "I call you friends." He says it here and now: "I call you friends."

What is it like to be a friend of Jesus? You already know. If you are my friend, I want others to think well of you as I do. If you are my friend, I'm concerned that no harm comes to you. There are countless stories of the bonds of friendship forged on the fields of war. Hurricane Katrina and the Red River floods forged bonds that will last a lifetime. C.S. Lewis said it well. Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another, "You too? I thought I was the only one!"

Friends shed tears. I read the story of an African American woman who served a Southern belle for over 70 years. The belle died, and a neighbor came to comfort the servant. "I know you miss her. You were such good friends." "Yes," said the old servant. "I'm sad she died, but we weren't friends." "Not friends?" "Yes," said the servant. "We've laughed, and we've talked – but Miss Ruth never cried. Folks have to cry together before they are friends."

Be careful of friendship as Jesus pictured it. His friends put their lives on the line. "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

Kevin was one of those kids who, like me, was a sports klutz. When the team captains chose, Kevin was the loser, the last. He complained to the teacher who promptly made him a captain. He has now to choose. He looks at his best friend – a worse klutz than himself – and chooses him first. So it goes. He kept picking the losers. How did the team do? They didn't come close, but they never had a better time. "I have called you friends. I have chosen you," says Jesus. Look who he chose. Not Pharosés and centurions. Fishermen. Women. Tax Collectors. Then he chose me. Then he chose you. Jesus elects the rejects. He calls us friends.

Now love one another. Be friends. You are my friends. For that, let us give thanks.